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(S.E.P.S.M.E.A.)

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NINETEENTH-CENTURY
WALLO, ETHIOPIA

Revival, Reform and Reaction

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BY

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Hussein Ahmed
Birmingham/Addis Ababa
Summer 1999

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

A. Arabic

In the transliteration of Arabic terms, the following system has been adopted. But while a firm attempt has been made at consistency and clarity, it has not been possible, due to technical reasons, to fully meet the requirements of the specialist.

Broadly speaking, we have adhered to the system used in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (new ed.), except in the transliteration of the following letters:

<i>Letters</i>	<i>in EI</i>	<i>in our text</i>
<i>ghayn</i>	<i>gh</i>	<i>gh</i>
<i>jim</i>	<i>dj</i>	<i>j</i>
<i>rāf</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>q</i>
<i>tā' marbūta</i>	not indicated	not indicated

B. Amharic and Ge'ez

It is necessary to note that there is not a single standardized system for transliterating Amharic and Ethiopic (Ge'ez). Almost every book or article on Ethiopia has its own conventional system. It is therefore no exaggeration to say that there are more systems of transliteration (especially if we keep in mind the inconsistencies which tend to creep into texts, including the present one) than the number of specialists of Ethiopian studies. The present study, while not claiming to set a standard, has adopted the following system which largely conforms to that used in the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*.

Ethiopic/Amharic consonants

Latin alphabet

<i>ha</i>	<i>h</i>
<i>la</i>	<i>l</i>
<i>ma</i>	<i>m</i>
<i>sa</i>	<i>s</i>

<i>sh</i>	<i>sh</i>
<i>ra</i>	<i>r</i>
<i>qa</i>	<i>q</i>
<i>ba</i>	<i>b</i>
<i>ta</i>	<i>t</i>
<i>cha</i>	<i>ch</i>
<i>na</i>	<i>n</i>
<i>ña</i>	<i>n̄</i>
<i>a</i>	,
<i>ka</i>	<i>k</i>
<i>za</i>	<i>z</i>
<i>zha</i>	<i>zh</i>
<i>wa</i>	<i>w</i>
<i>ya</i>	<i>y</i>
<i>da</i>	<i>d</i>
<i>ja</i>	<i>j</i>
<i>ga</i>	<i>g</i>
<i>la</i>	<i>l</i>
<i>cha</i>	<i>ch</i>
<i>pa</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>ṣa</i>	<i>s</i>
<i>fa</i>	<i>f</i>
<i>pa</i>	<i>p̄</i>

INTRODUCTION

Vowelling

Ethiopic

Latin

<i>la</i>	<i>la</i> (as in earth)
<i>lu</i>	<i>lu</i> (as in full)
<i>ti</i>	<i>ti</i> (as in tea)
<i>la</i>	<i>la</i> (as in bar)
<i>le</i>	<i>le</i> (as in bed)
<i>le</i>	<i>le</i> (as in wanted)
<i>lo</i>	<i>lo</i> (as in force)

The research upon which this study is based was therefore conceived with those objectives in mind.

The available literature on Islam in Ethiopia has so far hardly or insufficiently tackled the following questions. What were the mechanisms by which Islam spread, expanded and established itself as a religion and way of life within Ethiopia? In what ways, and to what extent, did indigenous Muslim clerics, traders and chiefs contribute to the development of a distinct Islamic culture at the national, regional and local levels? What are the Ethiopian Muslim perceptions about the pattern and manifestations of Islamic expansion and its role in social and cultural integration? Are the available sources adequate for a historical reconstruction of Islam in Ethiopia? What was the nature of the relationship between Islam, on the one hand, and the local and regional power structures, on the other? Is there a solid justification for the assumption that indigenous Islam was a naturally of external expansionist Muslim states? The present study was undertaken to shed some light on these and other neglected aspects of the history of Islam in Ethiopia.

The fieldwork was originally intended to cover both Wallo and northern Shawā. But the present study focuses on Wallo, and indeed on those parts of Wallo which were easily accessible at the time of the fieldwork. However, it soon became apparent that the areas in northern Shawā, especially Darrā in the northwest and Hāt in the northeast, which were initially to be studied, were historically, culturally and geographically linked to Wallo, and that, to a great extent, the study of Wallo can also contribute to an understanding of historical developments in northern Shawā.

This work is primarily based on oral information obtained through interviews in Amharic and written data in Arabic gathered during the course of the fieldwork in 1982/83 and in subsequent years, as well as on primary and secondary sources in those and other languages, and on archival material. The data collected in the field revealed the richness and vitality of local Muslim culture and scholarship and the weaknesses of the prevailing assumptions about the development of Islam and its role in the history of the country. As the bibliography amply demonstrates, this work has also immensely benefitted from further research conducted and publications completed by the present writer, and by other scholars, during the course of the dozen or so years which have elapsed since the thesis was originally submitted under the title, "Clerics, Traders and Chiefs: A Historical Study of Islam in Wallo (Ethiopia), With Particular Emphasis on the Nineteenth Century" to the Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham in 1985.

No claim is made to have exhausted the subject but only to have opened up new questions and issues in order to prepare the ground for a more intensive research on it. If the study stimulates further work, it will have fulfilled its most central objectives: the opening up of new aspects and themes for research into Islam from the perspective of its own internal dynamics and pointing to the potential for further study and the existence of new source materials, the need to assess the role of Islam in the development of the overall Ethiopian culture, and the necessity of questioning the validity of the prevailing scholarly approach which has so far tended to perceive and interpret the presence of Islam as an ephemeral political phenomenon and a source of perennial threats to Ethiopia's national existence.

The Existing Literature on Islam: A Review of Some Features and Trends

The sources on Islam in Ethiopia include those specifically concerned with Islam and general studies which contain passing references to Islam. What are the major trends in, and principal features of, this exclusive and apparently unwieldy corpus of source material?

Firstly, in both the specialized and general secondary sources, there is a consistent and clearly discernible over-emphasis on the purely political and military aspects of the relations between the "culturally homogeneous" Christian kingdom and the various Muslim sultanates during the mediaeval period. These relations, we are led to believe, more often than not manifested themselves in violent confrontations, and were largely an outcome of the intransigence of the Muslim protagonists. Moreover, according to the same sources, these conflicts were essentially destructive of the Christian material and cultural heritage, and thus contributed in no small measure to the disintegration of the Christian state and society. This kind of interpretation is misleading for two reasons:

- a) it is based on the questionable premise that the society of north and central Ethiopia was at that time (13th to 16th century) exclusively Christian in religious affiliation and ethnically and linguistically homogeneous, sharing a common socio-political tradition: in short, a fully-integrated and solidly-unified polity. This is, of course, far from the truth. On the contrary, the so-called Christian highland core was also the homeland of many Muslim communities with an equally ancient cultural heritage,¹ and of other non/ pre-Christian and Muslim ethnic groups who were at varying levels of internal political development and assimilation into the culture of the dominant groups. It is not therefore difficult to realize that this must have been even truer of the period and situation prior to the sixteenth century.
- b) it has consistently overlooked the debilitating effects of the wars upon settled life in the Muslim areas. It should be noted that both the Muslim and Christian sources confirm the existence of a number of trading centres and urban settlements which flourished in the Muslim regions and which were often the targets of plundering

¹ Taddeesse Tamrat, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea and the Horn" in Roland Oliver (ed.), *Cambridge History of Africa* (Cambridge, 1977), vol. 3, p. 104.

Christian troops, and were consequently completely destroyed.² That the traditional armies had always been the scourge of cultivators and traders—both Christian and Muslim—has been noted by many commentators on the mediaeval and post-mediaeval scene.³ Hence, both sides were equally destructive and responsible for the depletion of each other's human and material resources.

Secondly, the emphasis on wars and the notion that Islam represented only an external political force,⁴ rather than being one of the essential elements of the Ethiopian culture, resulted in the neglect of other more crucial aspects of the history of Islam, such as the mechanisms and modes of its introduction and expansion, the social and economic history of Muslim communities, their literary and oral traditions, and the role of Islam in the process of regional and national integration.⁵

Thirdly, with few exceptions, most studies are based on external Arabic sources, European travellers' accounts and Ethiopic Christian chronicles. These need to be supplemented by indigenous sources composed by Ethiopian Muslims themselves in order to broaden the existing historiographical perspective and redress the imbalance.

Fourthly, the studies so far undertaken deal almost exclusively with Islam outside the north-central plateau. Communities in the core regions have not attracted scholarly attention at all; in many cases, even their very existence has not been recognized.

Fifthly, a dominant theme in the existing literature is the view that internal developments within the Muslim areas, such as the expansion of Islam and the mediaeval conflicts with the Christian kingdom, are attributable to external factors. For example, it is to the non-indigenous 'ulama' that the credit for the propagation of Islam

² Idem, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 134, 146.
³ For instance, Richard Cawlk, "Armies as Predators: Soldiers and Peasants in Ethiopia c. 1850-1935," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, XI, 3 (1978), pp. 457-93. For an earlier period, see Jules Perruchon, "Histoire d'Eskender, d'Anda-Seyon II et de Nâ'od, rois d'Ethiopie," *Journal Asiatique*, III, 9 (1894), p. 342 (text), p. 357 (transl.); Almeida in C.F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford (trans./ed.), *Some Records of Ethiopia 1593-1646* (London, 1954), pp. 79-80.

⁴ Edward Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians: An Introduction to Country and People* (London, 1960), pp. 62, 68, 72, 75, 113. J. Spencer Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia* (London, 1952), pp. 113-14; Joseph M. Cuq, *Les Musulmans en Afrique* (Paris, 1975), pp. 366, 378.

⁵ In addition to Taddesse, two other recent writers have recognized Islam as a basis of integration: Donald N. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiblthic Society* (London/Chicago, 1974), pp. 42-44, 165 and Sven Rubenson, "Ethiopia and the Horn" in John E. Flint (ed.), *Cambridge History of Africa* (Cambridge, 1976), vol. 5, p. 51.

and the establishment of a Muslim culture is usually given. The role of Egyptian, Ottoman and Arab interests in the mediaeval conflicts is depicted as being a more decisive factor than the internal socio-economic pressures within the Muslim and Christian communities. The fieldwork on which the present study is based has strengthened the general optimism about the existence of a great amount and range of untapped source materials relevant to Islam in Ethiopia. However, a casual comparison between the literature on, for instance, Islam in West Africa and in Ethiopia clearly reveals the vast gulf separating the two regions in terms of research output, the sheer volume and diversity of published and unpublished material, and the depth of analysis of the studies so far completed on the subject. Ethiopian Islam as a field of study and research has not been well represented at international academic fora and in specialist journals in a manner which meets the needs of both the general reading public and those of the prospective researcher.

What have been the salient factors for the neglect of research into Islam in Ethiopia and for the imbalance and lack of interest in its history? Foremost among these has been the prevailing focus of students of Ethiopian history and culture exclusively on the Christian paradigm with which the country as a whole is conventionally identified. This is partly, but not exclusively, dictated by the nature of the most readily available sources. However, even after this allowance has been made, some leading scholars of Ethiopian history still show a firm and persistent reluctance to conceive of, let alone recognize, a history of Islam in Ethiopia as a distinct and legitimate field of study which could complement that of the Christian communities in the country. Another crucial factor is the negative impact which the armed conflicts between the mediaeval Christian kingdom and the Muslim principalities has had on popular attitudes towards, and on the scholarly interpretation of, the role of Islam in the course of those events. Subsequently, indigenous Islam has been closely associated with external forces of aggression. This has long remained the standard view of most scholars writing about the history of Islam in Ethiopia.

Intended as a modest contribution towards a better understanding of Islam in the context of Ethiopian studies, the present study of Islam in nineteenth-century Wallo will seek, in the following chapters, to contextualize and historicize some of the issues raised, and to argue that Islam has been, even at the regional level, much more

than an internal political factor *vis-à-vis* the Ethiopian state; it has also represented a historical and contemporary cultural tradition and served as a basis of identity for Ethiopian Muslim communities.

The central theme of this study, which is an extensively revised, abridged and updated version of my doctoral thesis completed in 1985⁶ is the historical development of Islam and an indigenous Muslim culture in Ethiopia from a regional perspective. The geographical areas treated are the central, southern and eastern parts of Wallo which is in north-central Ethiopia. Chronologically, the emphasis is on the nineteenth century, a period characterized by crucial events in the region itself, in Ethiopia and in the wider Islamic world, although the background discussion of the region's political geography, demography and history of Islamization also examines earlier periods.

The role of Muslim clerics, traders and chiefs in the process of the cultivation and consolidation of Islamic culture, and the dynamic relationship between them, are the other principal themes of the study.

The first chapter is a historical overview of Wallo from the early mediaeval times up to the late sixteenth century, with particular reference to its ethnic and geographical configuration, and the impact of the Oromo settlement on the region's subsequent political and cultural history.

Chapter II tackles two crucial aspects of the history of Islam in Ethiopia in general and in Wallo in particular: its introduction and mechanisms of dissemination. The views of some scholars regarding the chronology and modes of Islamization will be critically re-examined. The discussion will show that Islam spread into the Ethiopian hinterland much earlier than is often thought and that the existing oral traditions of Islamization strongly emphasize the prominent role of indigenous clerics in the propagation of the religion.

The third chapter seeks to identify the sources of external influence that helped to trigger the recrudescence of Islam in Wallo in the first half of the nineteenth century, and the various forms which it took: the expansion of the Sufi orders and the emergence of centres of scholarship and of local pilgrimage. The main objective of

the chapter is to demonstrate that, although the inspiration for the revivalist trend in local Islam emanated from the classical Islamic heartlands outside Ethiopia, it was the indigenous scholars of Wallo and Ifat who took the initiative for introducing the new ideas and adapting them to the specific conditions of their time. The contribution of the mystical orders to the cultivation and consolidation of Islam, the influence of the major Sufi centres upon the religious and social lives of the local communities, the character and scope of Islamic education, and the careers and achievements of three of the most articulate exponents of the Islamic revival and reform are discussed at some length. The efforts of these Muslim reformers reflect the vitality, intellectual sophistication and breadth of vision of the Wallo 'ulama² of the nineteenth century.

Chapter IV is a discussion of the rise of regionally-based political entities in Wallo extending from the Bashlo and Millē Rivers in the north to the Wanchit River in the south. It also examines the relationship between Islam and these entities in the period from 1700 to 1850. The principal theme of this chapter is, therefore, the interaction between two idioms of allegiance and legitimacy, the one dynastic, the other religious. It will be argued that throughout this period, Islam reinforced political power in Wallo, especially in Warra, Himano and Qallu. The Muslim hereditary rulers in turn demonstrated their vigorous commitment to the consolidation and expansion of the frontier of Islam. Even after the 1840s, when their internal rivalry led to political fragmentation, the position of Islam and the religious zeal of the dynasts remained intact. An account of the complex relationship between Muslim clerics and chiefs concludes the chapter.

In Chapter V another element of the relationship between Islam and local authorities will be examined: nineteenth-century caravan trade. The focus of the discussion is southeastern Wallo which, owing to favourable internal and external circumstances, emerged as an inland commercial emporium and a centre of long-distance trade. Various groups of enterprising trading families, who were themselves branches of a wider commercial diaspora operating over extensive areas in northern, central and southern Ethiopia, played a decisive role in this development. The chapter will also discuss the social and economic organization of these communities, and their interaction with the local clerics and hereditary chiefs.

Chapter VI is an analysis of the position of Islam in Wallo *vis-à-vis* the imperial Christian court of the second half of the nineteenth

⁶ The idea of publishing the thesis goes back to March 1986 when I returned to Addis Ababa University to take up a teaching, and later an administrative, position in the Department of History which did not allow me to have a sufficiently long stretch of time and the concentration that a thorough revision of the thesis required until I took my long-overdue sabbatical leave in January 1999.

CHAPTER ONE

century, a crucial turning point in the history of Islam in the region and the country as a whole. Against the backdrop of the political decline and final disintegration of Wallo, the specific policies of the centralizing Christian monarchs—Tewodros II and Yohannes IV—towards both local dynastic power and Islam will be examined, and their underlying motives and immediate and long-term consequences discussed. The chapter will analyze the Muslim reaction to Yohannes's policy of religious coercion which was inspired, organized and led by militant clerics, and assess the scholarly interpretations of that policy. The crucial role of Islam as a mobilizing force behind the resistance will be highlighted through a brief account of the careers of two militant Wallo clerics. Finally, the chapter re-evaluates Yohannes's policy towards Islam.⁷

The last chapter summarizes and integrates the major themes introduced and developed in the study: the pervasive role of Islam as a basis for cultural identity and integration, transcending political, ethnic and provincial parochialisms and loyalties, and the significance of Wallo as a preeminent centre of a rich indigenous Islamic culture and a vibrant religious, economic and intellectual life.

Based on a wide variety of foreign and local sources, both written and oral, the present study throws light on a number of crucial aspects of Ethiopian historiography: the recognition of Islam as a positive and constructive historical and cultural phenomenon; the contribution of the local potentates to the further consolidation of Islam in the region under review; the complexity of the process of the development of regional Islam; the role of clerics and merchants in that process; the vitality of local Islam and level of Islamic scholarship; and the relationship between Islam and the Christian court of nineteenth-century Ethiopia.

WALLO: THE DEMOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL SETTING

The physical formation of a country is the key to the history of its early settlement...

Trevelyan¹

Introduction

The central, and in many ways crucial, location of historical and contemporary Wallo² as a point of contact and interactions between the predominantly Semitic-speaking north and northwest plateaux, and the largely Kushitic southern and eastern plains, and its ecological, climatic and topographical diversity comprising the scorching wastes of the eastern lowlands and the cool highlands and fertile river valleys of its central massif, have had an indelible and durable impact upon the ethnic configuration of its people and the historical evolution of their culture. As the region commanded a pivotal strategic position in the north-south geographical axis, it has served throughout the mediaeval and early modern periods as a natural route for population movements and military conquests as well as a

¹ George Macaulay Trevelyan, *A Shortened History of England* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, reprint, 1976), p. 21.

² "Wallo" is a post-sixteenth century ethnic and geographical designation given to the southern part of the mediaeval province of Amhara, which came to be inhabited by the Wallo clans of the Oromo people. Subsequently, the term acquired a wider territorial, ethnic and cultural connotation. The demarcation of the present-day (1980s) administrative region (province, according to pre-1975 designation) of Wallo is a fairly recent creation dating from 1941. It includes both the Agaw- and Amharic-speaking provinces of 'historical Abyssinia'; those areas where the Oromo settled; and the Atar-speaking province of Awsā. Administratively, it comprised twelve provinces (*awrajjas*), one of which included the regional capital, Dessie, and chief of the eldest son of the last Ethiopian monarch. Currently, it consists of two administrative zones, North and South, within the Amhara regional state. In the present chapter, and indeed throughout the study, the term Wallo, unless stated otherwise, is used in its widest sense.

⁷ The first chapter of the thesis, dealing with the literature of Islam in Ethiopia, has been left out from the present study partly because it was published, with minor revisions, under the title "The Historiography of Islam in Ethiopia," in *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1992), pp. 15–46, and partly because the subject matter does not fit in with the three central themes treated here: revival, reform and reaction.

line of retreat for regional and imperial troops.³ Wallo was also an attractive land for migration and settlement for both the sedentary populations from the north and the nomadic communities from the east and the southeast, beginning from the late Aksumite period until the seventeenth century. Furthermore, it was a testing ground for the integrating and centralizing policies of the Gondarine and early modern emperors though Wallo itself remained politically fragmented. In other words, Wallo has been a cultural melting pot where a process of constant intermingling and fusion of heterogeneous elements has been going on for quite a long time.⁴

Broadly speaking, five historical currents or cultural layers have contributed to the diversity of Wallo's cultural heritage and geographical configuration until the end of the period with which the present study is concerned. The first of these currents was the early Christian Amhara settlement in the region and the establishment of Christian centres and communities. The emergence of the province of Amhara as a territorial base for the rise to power of the "restored" Solomonic dynasty, which supplanted the Agaw Zāgwe ruling house in 1270,⁵ was the political manifestation of the Christian predominance in the region. The second stratum was the military conquest and occupation of Wallo by the Muslim forces of *Imām* Ahmad b. Ibrāhīm (d. 1543) in the course of the first half of the sixteenth century. Although this event represents a brief interlude in the long history of the region, it had far-reaching immediate and long-term consequences for subsequent developments. The third current was the population movement and the permanent settlement of several clans of the Oromo in the eastern, central and western parts of the region beginning from the second half of the sixteenth century. The

A fairly close look into the topographic, climatic and ethnographic makeup of both highland and lowland Wallo is necessary in order to understand the region's historical development in the context of both mediaeval and nineteenth-century Ethiopia.

The early history of Wallo is preserved in a number of traditions which refer to the existence of Amharic-speaking Christian communities in northern and western highland Wallo; the Agaw, an important Kushitic group which, during the period of the Zāgwe dynasty (from the mid-twelfth to the late thirteenth century), wielded and exercised political power over a good part of north and north-central Ethiopia, in the northwest; and, finally, Kushitic semi-nomadic groups on Wallo's long eastern frontier. Trimmingham's remark that the Wallo region "was once inhabited by the Christian Amhara"⁶ is misleading since the areas of dense Amhara settlement, though extensive, covered only some parts of the plateau.⁷ Alternatively, his statement

³ For instance, it was through Angot that the troops of King Amda Seyon (r. 1314–44), and those of his descendants, marched during the campaigns to the south and southeast: Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 82, n. 1.

⁴ Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 193; D. Crumtree, in his review of Volker Stitz's *Studien zur Kulturgeographie Zentralafrikas* (Bonn, 1974) in *IJAHs*, 8, 3 (1975), p. 530, wrote that northern Shawa and southern Wallo constituted "the area of most prolonged and intimate Galla-Amhara interaction [since the sixteenth century] . . .".

⁵ This is not to minimize the predominant position of the Agaw element both before and after the settlement of the Amhara in the region. However, from the point of view of both the expansion of Semitic-speaking peoples southwards and the developments of the late thirteenth century and the subsequent period affecting the area, such as the consolidation of Islam and the growth of regionally-based political entities, the Agaw districts in northwest Wallo seem to have played no significant role. See Tadesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea . . .", pp. 111–12.

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⁶ Trimmingham, loc. cit. See also Tadesse Tamrat, "The Horn of Africa: the Solomonids in Ethiopia and the states of the Horn of Africa" in D.T. Niane (ed.), *Unesco General History of Africa* (Paris/London/Berkeley, 1984), IV, p. 425; Asnake Ali, "A Historical Survey of Social and Economic Conditions in Wallo, 1872–1917", in Tadesse Beyene (ed.), *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 26–30 November 1984 (Frankfurt-am-Main/Huntingdon, 1988), vol. 1, p. 263.

⁷ Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 37, n. 4. There is a settlement perched on a high ridge to the southeast of Kombolchā and near the market of Anchārro which used

might imply that the whole of southern and eastern Wallo constituted an uninhabited stretch of territory, thus ignoring the long presence of the non-Semitic-speaking communities. As Merid's study of the political geography of Ethiopia before and during the eventful sixteenth century clearly demonstrates,⁸ the region we now know as Wallo was made up of a number of large and small provinces: Bugnā, Qēdā, Wāg and Lāstā which were located in the northeast and northwest, and Angot which extended from the Allamātā River to Lake Hayq. Part of Angot later became the homeland of the Yaju Oromo. Before that, much of it had been inhabited by Christian Amhara cultivators. Angot's eastern frontier touched on the Danakil country.⁹

The largest province which has often been referred to (erroneously) as the nucleus of, or even as a synonym for, Wallo proper,¹⁰ was Amhara, which stretched from north of Lake Hayq westwards to the Bashlo River and the tortuous Chachaho spur,¹¹ which separated it from Bagēmēder. Amhara extended to the arca around present-day Warra Ilu in the southeast.¹² During the Zāgwē period, Amhara was

to be the residence of a fairly sizeable and prosperous community of long-distance merchants until its demise since the mid-sixties, owing to the growth and expansion of Kombolchā at the junction of the Addis Ababa-Dessie and Dessie-Assab transport and commercial network. The village's name is Gadām (Ethiopic: monastery) and its location on the other side of a steep precipice overlooking the plains of the Borkanna River below it, suggests that it must have been a frontier Christian monastic centre and perhaps even a garrison. According to informants, the churches in and around it were destroyed in the time of Grāñ. More than three centuries later, it was settled by emigrant trading families from Dariā in Bagēmēder.

⁸ Merid Wolde Aregay, "Political Geography of Ethiopia at the beginning of the Sixteenth Century" in *IV Congresso Internazionale di Studi Etiopici (Roma, 10-15 aprile 1972)* (Roma, 1974), pp. 613-31; idem, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian Kingdom 1508-1708 with Special Reference to the Galla Migrations and their Consequences" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1971), pp. 18-59.

⁹ Merid, "Political Geography . . ." p. 619.

¹⁰ There are two traditions about the name of the region before the settlement of the Oromo. According to the first, it was "Lako Malza"; Zergaw Asfera, "Some Aspects of Historical Development in 'Amhara/Wallo' (ca. 1700-1855)" (unpublished B.A. thesis, Department of History, Addis Ababa University, 1973), p. 3 or da C. Conti Rossini) (1945), p. 87. Conti Rossini thinks it is made up of two adjoining provinces: Malza and Saco. According to the second tradition, the region used to be known as "Kolo"; Arnauld d'Abbadie, *Douce ans de Seigneur dans la Haute-Ethiopie (Abyssinie)* Jeanne-Marie Allier (ed.) (Vatican, 1980), II, pp. 199-204.

¹¹ On the strategic significance of the Chachaho for the effective control of northern central Ethiopia, and for a lucid description of the struggles waged along this axis among the warlords of the 18th and 19th centuries, see D. Crumney, "Čäčäño and the politics of the northern Wallo-Bagēmēder border," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, XIII, 1 (1975), pp. 1-9.

¹² Merid, "Political Geography . . ." p. 621. The terms "Amhara" and "Bagēmēder"

have also come to be used rather loosely to refer to larger and smaller units. According to Almeida, in the 17th century, Amhara was a very extensive territory bordered by Ifat in the east, Angot in the northeast, Bagēmēder in the north, Shawa in the south and Gojām in the west: Beckingham and Huntingford, *Some Records of Ethiopia*, p. 18. See also Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (London, 1976), p. 35, n. 18. Arnauld d'Abbadie makes the Takkazē River the boundary between Amhara and Tigray: *Douce ans . . .*, I, p. 43, and even speaks of a small province northwest of Wallo called Amārā; op. cit., p. 63, which can be identified with the district of Amārā Säyent. G.W.B. Huntingford, *The Historical Geography of Ethiopia* ed. Richard Pankhurst (Oxford, 1989), pp. 80-81.

¹³ Taddeese, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea . . ."

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁵ Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 23.

¹⁶ Donald Crumney, "Abyssinian Feudalism," *Past and Present*, 89 (1980), p. 281-83, 306. This work is a translation of *Futūh al-Habasha*, the chronicle written by Shihāb al-Dīn Ahmad b. 'Abd al-Qādir b. Sālim b. Uthmān (surnamed 'Arab Faqrī). There are also less authoritative Italian, French and, recently, an Arabic edition and a Harari translation: C. Nicazzini, *La Conquista Muslimana dell'Etiopia nel secolo XVI* (Roma, 1891); A. d'Abbadie and P. Paulitschke, *Futūh al-Habasha* (Paris, 1898). See also a version based on the *Futūh* included in E. Denison Ross (ed.), *An Arabic History of Gujarat* (London, 1921) and Fahim Shaltūt (ed.), *Tuhfat al-Zāmān aw Futūh al-Habasha* (Cairo?), 1974. The subtitle of this edition and the editor's introduction suggest that Grāñ's campaign was considered a Somali national movement. The Harari translation was done by 'Abd al-Karīm Almad under the title *Wārāg Zāmān Futūh al-Habash* (Addis Ababa, 1995). The textual history of the original Arabic manuscript is rather complex and deserves a closer examination than it has hitherto received. The French traveller and scholar, Antoine d'Abbadie, procured two variants of the manuscript: Joseph Toubiana in his preface to Arnauld's *Douce ans . . .*, I, xiv, n. 31. See also Toubiana, "Ouvrages Manuscrits concernant l'Ethiopie à la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris," *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, XV (1959), p. 102. The fate of Basset's MSS is unknown. There is also a 19th-century manuscript version of the chronicle presented by Charles Gordon in 1881 to the British Museum:

century, the Wallo clans of the Oromo had occupied eastern and southern Ambara.

The province of Gaññ, which was more of a military settlement than an administrative division,¹⁸ bordered on both Angot and Ambara, and was situated to the southeast of Lakes Hayq and Ardiibbo, and to the east of the Borkanna River.¹⁹ There is a tentative suggestion that, in the time of King Amda Seyon (r. 1314–44), the area east of Amhara was known as Bequlzar.²⁰ The province of Gaññ included Wāsal, an important trading entrepot, which contained Christian and Muslim Amhara living together as a single community.²¹

The modern region of Wallo, much larger in size than its historical precursor, has a total surface area of 79,000 square kilometres and a population of 2,612,000.²² It contains the headwaters of several fairly big rivers which flow into major river systems on its northern, eastern and southern frontiers. In the northeast are the Allamāā, Gollinā and Alā Rivers. Further south, the Millē and Borkannā are the tributaries of the Awāsh which loses itself in the arid sands of the Danakil Depression. In the northwest is the mighty Takkazē, while the Bashio and its tributaries join the Abbāy. In the southwest, the Walaqā, Boto and Wanchit Rivers also feed the Abbāy to form “deep valleys of gigantic basaltic faults.”²³

Or. 2409; H.J. Goodacre, “Manuscript sources on Sub-Saharan Africa held by the Department of Oriental Manuscripts and Printed Books of the British Library” (a paper read at the British Library Colloquium on African Studies, SOAS, University of London, 9–11 January 1985), p. 2. The present writer came across an early manuscript version written by an anonymous scribe dated A.H. 1064/1653 A.D. and entitled *Kūzāb al-Futiūk al-Habashī al-muṣammā Bahjat al-Zamānī*. For the first ever complete English translation, see Paul F.L. Stenhouse (forthcoming).

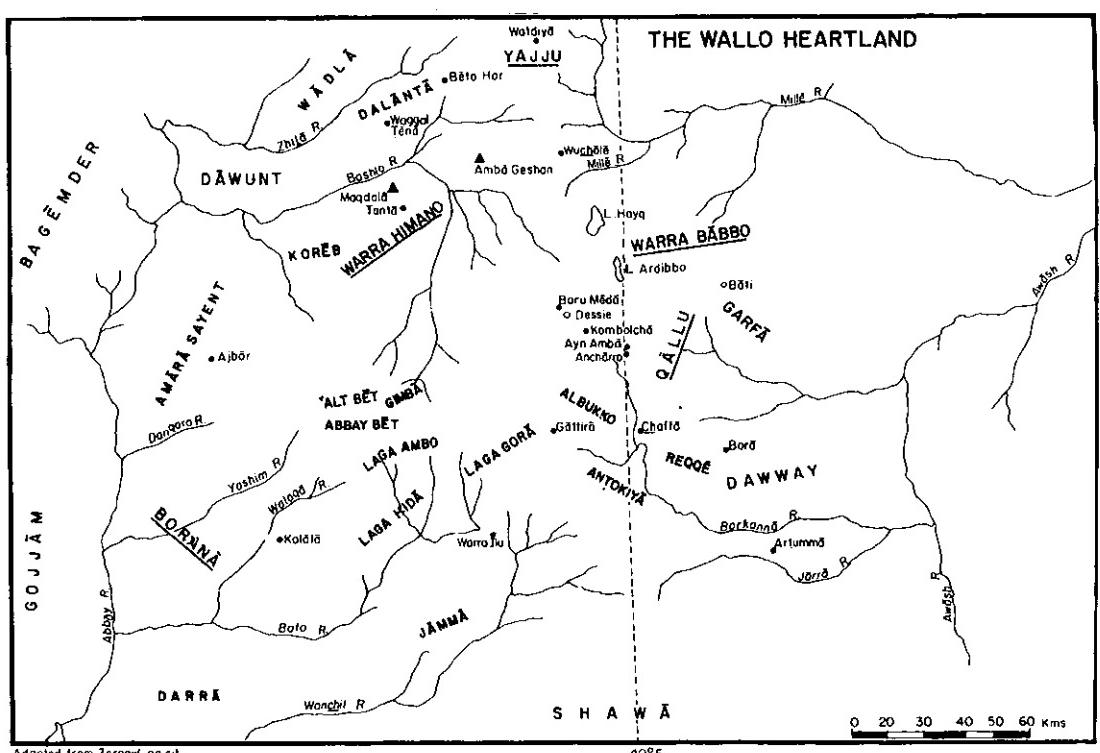
¹⁸ Merid, “Southern Ethiopia,” p. 39.

¹⁹ Idem, “Political Geography . . .,” p. 622, n. 29, but on the map in “Southern Ethiopia,” p. 36, Gaññ is actually placed west of the Borkanna River.

²⁰ G.W.B. Huntingford (trans./ed.), *The Glorious Victories of Amda Seyon, King of Ethiopia* (Oxford, 1965), p. 2 (map), but see also pp. 32, 35, where Bequlzar is described as being located between the eastern escarpment and Bādāq in the Walaqā area. According to Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 42, Bequlzar was inhabited by the Warjih and Gabal during the time of Amda Seyon.

²¹ Merid, “Political Geography . . .,” p. 622. However, Ulrich Braukämper, “Islamic Principalities in South-East Ethiopia between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries,” *Ethiopianist Notes*, 1, 1 (Spring 1977), p. 39 and 2 (Fall 1977), map 3, refers to Gedem as being located between the Mille and Robi Rivers, thus overlooking Gaññ to the southwest of which was Gedem.

²² The population figure is for July 1980: *The Statesman’s Year-Book 1984–85* (London, 1984), p. 445. See also the table in John Markakis, *Ethiopia: Anatomy of a Traditional Polity* (Oxford, 1974), p. 45.



Map 1. Central and Southern Wallo

The ecological diversity of the region reflects both its physical features and the distribution and pattern of human settlement. With the possible exception of the oasis of Awṣā (once the seat of a Muslim sultanate which flourished from the last quarter of the sixteenth up to the early eighteenth century), and of the narrow fertile loop of the lower course of the Awāsh,²⁴ the long stretch of land extending from southeastern Tegray down to southeastern Wallo is marked by rolling arid plains and deserts which historically have supported a sparse vegetation and human and animal life.²⁵ Within this strip of territory lies the Danakil Depression, one of the hottest spots on earth, which forms part of the extensive Eastern Rift Valley. The Zobel mountain range in the north, and the volcanic cones of the Afar region in the south, are the only landmarks which stand out in sharp contrast to the flat, monotonous and arid sandy plains of this torrid zone. Its early inhabitants were Kushitic-speaking groups belonging to the various clans of the Afar. There were also the Semitic-speaking Argobba who live in southeastern Wallo and northeastern Shawā. Further north were the nomadic Dobā, probably of Afar stock and later incorporated into the Yajju Oromo.²⁶ Originally pagan, they were later converted to Islam, and then to Christianity.²⁷ Nomadic pastoralism was the principal mode of life of the various groups inhabiting the region, although some lived as cultivators or guides for the caravan traders in salt (extracted from the saline beds of Lake Assal). This trade was carried on with their highland neighbours and their kinsmen on the coast. The main source of cultural

²⁴ The floods of the Awāsh River sustain extensive seasonal grazing lands: David Buxton, *The Abyssinians* (London, 1970), p. 21.

²⁵ For a late-19th-century account on the topography of the area inhabited by the Rāyyā Oromo and the adjacent hinterland, see Achille Raffray, "Voyage en Abyssinie et au Pays des Gallas Ratas," *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie*, III, vii (1882), pp. 324-52; Abargues de Sosten, "Voyage en Abyssinie, dans le Zeboul et les Wallo-Gallas," *Bulletin de la Société Khétiwak de Géographie* [Cairo], II, 6 (1885), pp. 320-24.

²⁶ Volker Sitz, "The Western Argobba of Yifat, Central Ethiopia" in Harold G. Marcus (ed.), *Proceedings of the First United States Conference on Ethiopian Studies, Michigan State University, 2-5 May 1973* (East Lansing, 1975), pp. 187ff.; Abebe Kifeveresu, "The Dynamics of Ethnicity in a Plural Polity: Transformation of Argobba Social Identity," Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1992, pp. 16-17.

²⁷ Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 81, n. 2. Cf. Merid, "Political Geography . . ." p. 618 and "Population Movements as a Possible Factor in the Christian-Muslim Conflict of Medieval Ethiopia," *Symposium Leo Frobenius* (Munich, 1974), p. 274.

²⁸ Merid, "Political Geography . . ." p. 618. Theirs is an example of shifting religious allegiance of frontier communities: Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," p. 100.

from southeastern Tegray down to southeastern Wallo is marked by rolling arid plains and deserts which historically have supported a sparse vegetation and human and animal life.²⁵ Within this strip of territory lies the Danakil Depression, one of the hottest spots on earth, which forms part of the extensive Eastern Rift Valley. The Zobel mountain range in the north, and the volcanic cones of the Afar region in the south, are the only landmarks which stand out in sharp contrast to the flat, monotonous and arid sandy plains of this torrid zone. Its early inhabitants were Kushitic-speaking groups belonging to the various clans of the Afar. There were also the Semitic-speaking Argobba who live in southeastern Wallo and northeastern Shawā. Further north were the nomadic Dobā, probably of Afar stock and later incorporated into the Yajju Oromo.²⁶ Originally pagan, they were later converted to Islam, and then to Christianity.²⁷ Nomadic pastoralism was the principal mode of life of the various groups inhabiting the region, although some lived as cultivators or guides for the caravan traders in salt (extracted from the saline beds of Lake Assal). This trade was carried on with their highland neighbours and their kinsmen on the coast. The main source of cultural

influence was the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden coast which also provided a commercial outlet for the hinterland and a point of entry for Islam. There are strong traditions about the crucial role which this zone has played not only as a channel of communication between the plateau communities and the outside world since the post-Aksumite period, but also, together with Ifat in the south, as a centre of diffusion of Islam into the rest of Wallo and Shawā.²⁸

Relations between the migrant pastoralists of the eastern periphery and the sedentary populations on the edge of the escarpment and beyond have been, in most cases, peaceful, despite the periodic eruptions and raids of the former and the largely defensive counter-raids of the latter.²⁹ The traditional abhorrence of the highlanders for the inhospitable climate of the lowlands,³⁰ and the need to keep the trade-routes safe and accessible, as well as the dependence of the pastoralists upon the cultivators for the supply of grain and other essential commodities, had a tempering effect on the conflicts that occasionally flared up between the two communities. Immediate economic interests and the need for mutual coexistence were therefore a far more permanent feature of their relationships than the incidental outbreaks of armed clashes which occurred only when a combination of demographic and economic pressures led to incursions by the nomads and temporarily disrupted their contacts with the settled communities. The threat of raids into the territories of the Christian kingdom by the nomads of the lowlands remained a perennial source of anxiety for the mediaeval rulers. It also influenced the evolution of provincial administration and frontier defence policies and strategies.³¹ In general, however, the two modes of subsistence—pastoralism and sedentary agriculture—complemented each other.³²

Immediately to the west of this arid strip and on the edge of the escarpment, and running almost parallel to it, is the river valley system comprising the basins of the Allamātā, Gollimā, Mille and Borkannā Rivers. It is an area rich in cereal agriculture based on

²⁸ Tadesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea . . ." pp. 105, 134, 139; Trimingham, op. cit., p. 139.

²⁹ Merid, "Population Movements . . ." pp. 269-70.

³⁰ Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia: the Era of the Princes, the Challenge of Islam and the Reunification of the Christian Empire 1769-1855* (London, 1968), pp. xix, 26; Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," p. 124.

³¹ Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," pp. 60, 65, 74, 86ff., 123-4.

³² Donald Crumney, "Ethiopian Plow Agriculture in the Nineteenth Century," *JES*, XVI (1983), p. 4.

the plough and in livestock breeding. It has been the home of settled communities engaged in trading and crafts such as weaving which depended on the cultivation of cotton in the warmer fringes of the area. Lakes Ashangē, Hayq and Ardibbo are within it, although the first is situated at a higher altitude. There is abundant rainfall which is supplemented by the occasional flooding of the streams and rivers bringing down deposits of rich soil from the upland country during the rainy season. This ecological zone is characterized by ethnic and cultural diversity: both Kushitic-speaking communities such as the Oromo and Semitic elements like the Amhara, the Tigrayans and the Argobbā are represented.

The highlands, which occupy only the central and western parts of the Wallo region, consist typically of inaccessible tabelands and mountain ranges such as the Ambāssal, Ambā Fārit (3975 m./13,042 ft.), situated to the southwest of Maqdālā, and Abbuuyē Mēda (4305 m./13,123 ft.), northwest of Kārrā Qorē. They also comprise the lower plains drained by the large tributaries of the Blue Nile: the Bashlo in the north and the Wanchit in the south. It is an area of intensive plough agriculture made possible by the high altitude and a sufficient amount of seasonal rainfall, and is a typical *dagā* zone (a rugged highland with a temperate climate and an elevation of 7,500–8,000 ft. or more), extending from the Bashlo River to northern Shawā.³⁴ In the long period before the Oromo settled in the southern, central and northern parts of Wallo, the predominant ethnic group in the area had been the Kushitic Agaw. It is believed that the Amharic language developed through the "pidginization and creolization" of their central Kushitic dialects.³⁵ The other group were the Amhara themselves. Culturally, the Amhara were part of the Semitic-speaking north. The various Christian communities in Wallo maintained close contact with their northern kinsmen and coreligionists,³⁶ which was reinforced by the region's role as a seat of the royal courts of the mediaeval period.

There is not much historical evidence which might throw some light on the ethnic and settlement pattern, or on the internal economic and political organization of the communities in the core and

peripheral areas of Wallo proper, prior to the epoch-making events of the sixteenth century. Therefore, the reconstruction of the history of the region during the period before the campaigns of *Imām* Ahmad and the arrival and settlement of the Oromo, has to be based on scattered traditions about the presence of Semitic-speaking groups in the area, and on Christian mediaeval sources. The Muslim traditions are too vague to enable us to establish the position of the non-Christian populations before that crucial period in the region's, and indeed, the country's history.

The only aspect of the history of pre-sixteenth-century Wallo that is relatively well-documented is the existence of Christian communities, some of them dating from the late Aksumite period, and the founding of churches, monasteries and imperial residences by the early mediaeval Christian monarchs.³⁷ The collapse of the Kingdom of Aksum resulted in the shift of the centre of political power from northern Ethiopia to the area with which the present study is partly concerned. Al-Yā'qūbī mentions Ka'bār as the capital of the Christian kingdom which might have been located between southern Tigray and Angot.³⁸ In Sāyent, a frontier district in western Wallo, the church of Tadbābā Māryām is of ancient origin. According to traditions collected by Brielli, the Italian physician and consul, Yekunno Amlāk (r. 1270–85), who is historically associated with the "restoration" of the Solomonic dynasty, was a native of Amhara and had his residence at a place called Mahonnañā. He later rebuilt the island monastery on Lake Hayq in Angot.³⁹ Tradition has it that the monastery was founded in the ninth century.⁴⁰ By the middle of the thirteenth century, it had become a famous monastic centre. In the late thirteenth century the royal prison of Ambā Geshan in Ambāssal was established. Until its partial destruction by Grāñ, it

³⁷ The earliest recorded tradition of Christian settlement in Amhara belongs to the first half of the ninth century: Tadesse, op. cit., p. 38.

³⁸ Tadesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea . . .", p. 101. Some have wrongly identified Ka'bār with Ankobar: J. Dorese, *Ethiopia* Elsa Courc (trans.) (London, 1959), pp. 25 (map), 91; informants, *Sagħġiha Muzaaffar* and Muhammed Waṭe. *Saqiħiha* Muhammad Ta'fi al-Din has convincingly argued against the tradition which makes Ankobar capital of the kingdom during the Prophet's time. Some, like Conti Rossini and Tringham, thought that Ka'bār was actually Aksum: Tadesse, loc. cit. See also John Wansbrough, "Africa and the Arab Geographers" in David Dalby (ed.), *Language and History in Africa* (London, 1970), p. 96, who concluded that Ka'bār is to be equated with another toponym, Jabara.

³⁹ Brielli, "Ricordi Storici . . .", p. 80.

⁴⁰ Tadesse, loc. cit., and *Church and State*, pp. 159–60.

³⁴ D'Abbadie, op. cit., II, pp. 110, 202.

³⁵ Levine, *Greater Ethiopia*, p. 72; Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians*, p. 125; Joseph Tubiana, "Aperçus sur l'enrichissement du vocabulaire amharique" in István Fodor and Claude Hagege (eds.), *Language Reform: History and Future* (Hamburg, 1984), III, p. 332.

³⁶ Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 162.

served as an important institution used by the monarchy to diffuse rival claims to the throne.⁴¹ During the reign of Zar'a Yā'eqob (r. 1434–68), the church of St. Mary at Geshan was founded. His successor, Ba'eda Māryām (r. 1468–78) established his court in Laga Hidā where the church of Atronza Māryām was established.⁴² His successors, Eskender (r. 1478–94) and Nā'od (r. 1494–1508), had also occasionally their royal camps in Amhara.⁴³ The latter built the church of Gannata Giyorgis in Geshan while Lebna Dengel (r. 1508–40) constructed that of Makāna Sellāsē.⁴⁴

In addition to these religious establishments and apparently only temporary royal residences, there were a number of military camps and settlements consisting of regiments of Christian troops stationed at various frontier posts, such as those on the mountains of Zobel, Gañī and Gedem, situated on the edge of the escarpments east of Amhara.⁴⁵ It is to be noted that the eastern frontier of Amhara was the route followed by King Amda Seyon during his campaign against Ifat in 1329.⁴⁶

The Grāñī Episode

Like other parts of central and northern Ethiopia, Amhara and its environs were subjected to several campaigns launched by the forces of *Imām* Ahmād b. Ibrāhīm in the early 1530s. In the contemporary Arabic chronicle of the conquest, two major points of relevance to Wallo are raised: a detailed description and then the looting and burning down of the old churches by the Muslim army, and the appointment of one *Amīr* Farashahm 'Alī as governor of Angot after the conclusion of the campaigns.⁴⁷ There is at least one reference in the text to the conversion of a royal residence near the church of Makāna Sellāsē into a mosque.⁴⁸ But the most important impact of

the conquest was felt less in the well-documented conversion (either voluntarily or through the imposition of tribute and other forms of coercion) of large numbers of the local people,⁴⁹ than the stimulus it gave to the already-established indigenous Muslim communities⁵⁰ through Grāñī's dramatic military successes and the influx of militant clerics, and also through the founding of new Muslim settlements in the region after the end of the wars.⁵¹

As will be described in a later chapter, these settlements were to become instrumental in the further consolidation of Islam. Grāñī also instituted an administrative structure for his new empire staffed by loyal members of the local aristocratic families of the subjugated areas but under the overall control of his own senior military commanders.⁵²

Another important consequence of the Muslim victories was the weakening of the frontier defences on the southern and eastern flanks of the Christian kingdom which proved incapable of withstanding the pressures and raids of the Oromo and their infiltration into the core Ethiopian highlands.⁵³

It should be borne in mind that the Wallo region was a theatre of several engagements between the Christian and Muslim forces⁵⁴ and served as a base for the latter's incursions into the north. It was also, for the Muslim armies, a supply route from their centre in the southeast and from the coast.⁵⁵ The social dislocation and material

⁴¹ Tringham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, pp. 87, 90; William El. Conzelman, *Chronique de Galāwādaw* (Paris, 1895), p. 5 (text), p. 123 (trans.). On the traditions of Muslim communities in Darra, northwest Shawā, and in the neighbourhood of Ankobar which date their Islamization from the time of Grāñī, see Heima Plazikowsky-Brauner, "Beiträge zur Geschichte des Islam in Abessinien," *Der Islam*, 32 (1957), p. 317.

⁴² Zergaw, "Some Aspects," p. 2; Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea, the Rise and Decline of the Solomonic Dynasty and Muslim-European Rivalry in the Region* (London, 1980), pp. 92, 100; Markakis, *Ethiopia*, pp. 31, 63.

⁴³ Tringham, op. cit., p. 193. Paradoxically, Tringham seems at the same time to contradict himself by saying that the conquest "had little impact on the religious complexion of the highlands"; p. 140. See also Brielli, "Ricordi Storici," p. 86; Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," p. 138.

⁴⁴ Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," p. 71. See also Taddesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea . . ." p. 174.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," p. 71. See also Taddesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea . . ." p. 174.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Merid, "Political Geography . . ." pp. 619, 622. See also n. 1 *supra*.

⁵⁰ Huntingford, *The Glorious Victories*, p. 36.

⁵¹ Basset, *Histoire de la Conquête*, pp. 59–60, 92, 139, 271, 306–18, 325, 403; Jules Perruchon, "Note pour l'histoire d'Ethiopie: Le Règne de Lebna-Dengel," *Révue Sémitique*, I (1893), p. 276 (*Ge'ez* text), p. 281 (trans.).

⁵² Basset, op. cit., p. 311.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ For instance, the Battle of Wāsal on 28 October 1531; Basset, *Histoire de la Conquête*, pp. 291–306.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹ Idem, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea . . ." pp. 133–34.

⁴² Brielli, op. cit., p. 91.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," p. 71. See also Taddesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea . . ." p. 174.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Huntingford, *The Glorious Victories*, p. 36.

⁴⁷ Basset, *Histoire de la Conquête*, pp. 59–60, 92, 139, 271, 306–18, 325, 403; Jules Perruchon, "Note pour l'histoire d'Ethiopie: Le Règne de Lebna-Dengel," *Révue Sémitique*, I (1893), p. 276 (*Ge'ez* text), p. 281 (trans.).

⁴⁸ Basset, op. cit., p. 311.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Basset, op. cit., p. 311.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ For instance, the Battle of Wāsal on 28 October 1531; Basset, *Histoire de la Conquête*, pp. 291–306.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

depredations which the march of large armies and movements of peoples caused to the indigenous communities of the area must have been immense. Hence, in both its positive and negative aspects, the Grāñ interlude was one of the most important factors which contributed to the shaping of the demographic and cultural contours of the Wallo region.

The Oromo Settlement and its Impact on Wallo

The seven clans of Eastern Kushitic-speaking Oromo who penetrated and settled in northern, north-eastern and south-western Amhara from the last quarter of the sixteenth century,⁵⁶ were the five major fractions of the Baraytuma (Warra⁵⁷ Dāya, Marawwā, Karayyu, Akkachu and Warantishā) and the Tulamā, a major division of the Boranā.⁵⁸ They followed different routes of movement. The Marawā and the Karayyu, who spearheaded the migration northwards, followed the eastern route through the valleys of the Robi, Borkamā and Mille Rivers which had often been used by nomadic pastoralists during their periodic incursions.⁵⁹ The Akkachu and Warantishā, who moved in their wake, spread out along the valleys of the Wachit, lower Jamā and Walaqā Rivers. The former settled in southern Amhara, Angot and Gaññ. The Warra Dāya, who were the last to follow, moved towards Mora and Awsā, and the Tulamā overran and settled in Walaqā and eastern Amhara.⁶⁰ As Stitz rightly observed, the Oromo, who were largely cattle-breeders and later on horsemen,

⁵⁶ Abir, op. cit., p. 164.

⁵⁷ "Warra" is a prefix meaning "people, family or descendants": G.W.B. Huntingford, *The Galla of Ethiopia: The Kingdoms of Kaga and Tanyero* (Ethnographic Survey of Africa, North-Eastern Africa, Part II) (London, 1955), p. 13, n. 11. It refers to "the last of descent group categories of decreasing genealogical depth... which... extends about four or five generations back": Levine, *Greater Ethiopia*, p. 131.

⁵⁸ The terms "Barayumā" (also Bārentu) and "Boranā" refer, respectively, to the eastern, sedentary and western, pastoral Oromo: Huntingford, op. cit., p. 11. There is some uncertainty as to which of the two Oromo moieties the Wallo belonged to: op. cit., p. 17. But see Triningham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 190: the language spoken by the Wallo belongs to that of the Boranā group.

⁵⁹ Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," p. 203.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 201, 330, 414–16, 546; Mohammed, "The Oromo of Ethiopia," pp. 231–32, 237–40, 250–54. Merid's observation in op. cit., p. 147, that the Oromo of Wallo and Tegrāy "as may be expected, are not sure of any direction [taken by their ancestors]" also reflects the difficulty of presenting a coherent account about the movements of the various groups.

preferred suitable localities in which they could practise both activities: the highlands of the central plateau—characterized by abundant rainfall—and the low areas east of the main escarpment, as well as the country along the Blue Nile.⁶¹

By the 1570s and 1580s, Angot and Amhara, which were to be settled by the Wallo, had become bases from where the different clans of the Baraytuma moved both northwards and westwards,⁶² which suggests that they had arrived in those provinces a little earlier than is usually thought.⁶³ The migration occurred in successive waves and thrusts by the various groups and, as Abir remarked, this might have had an unsettling effect on the process of the assimilation of the first waves into the indigenous communities.⁶⁴ It is quite likely that this was one of the factors which prevented the early emergence of a viable political entity (such as the later Oromo kingdoms in southwest Ethiopia) covering the whole of the Wallo region, while also making difficult the integration of the region into the Gondarine and post-Gondarine Christian empire.

According to a long-established tradition, the Wallo were a clan of the Karayyu branch of the Baraytuma Oromo. The term "Wallo" is said to have been derived from the name of their putative eponymous ancestor who is believed to have been the second son of Karayyu. The same tradition recounts that Wallo himself had six sons: Warra Bukko, Warra Gurra, Warra Nolē'ilu, Warra Karayyu, Warra Ilu and Warra Nolē'ali. After a process of internal differentiation which, according to Conti Rossini, occurred around 1585,⁶⁵ and might have been a consequence of dispersal over a wide area and through a difficult terrain,⁶⁶ the groups named after the first three sons joined together to form what was known as the "Wallo Confederation of Clans", which in turn became the nucleus of yet a larger subgroup: the "Seven Clans, or Houses, of Wallo".

⁶¹ Volker Stitz, "The Amhara Resettlement of Northern Shoa during the 18th and 19th centuries" in *Rural Africana*, 11 (1970), p. 71. See also d'Abbadie, *Douce ans...*, p. 203.

⁶² Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea*, pp. 164, 188. That is, in spite of the inaccessibility of Amhara and Angot, and the attempts of the communities to resist Oromo penetration: Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," pp. 323, 326, 331, 512.

⁶³ Huntingford, *The Galla of Ethiopia*, p. 19; Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," p. 204.

⁶⁴ M. Abir, "Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa" in Richard Gray (ed.), *Cambridge History of Africa* (Cambridge, 1975), vol. 4, p. 560. The earliest reported raid on Dambiyā by the Baraytuma occurred in 1569: Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," p. 324.

⁶⁵ Brielli, "Ricordi Storici," p. 89, n. 31.

⁶⁶ Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," p. 330; Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea*, p. 166.

There are conflicting traditions about the names of the various clans and subclans of the Wallo. According to Bahrey, the author of the earliest indigenous account of the Oromo migration which was composed in 1543, they were, as indicated earlier, the Warra *Bukko*, Warra *Gurra*, Warra *Nolé'ali*, Warra *Karrayyu*, Warra *Ilu* and Warra *Nolé'ali*.⁶⁷ In the 1840s Krapf listed the following as making up the Wallo: Warra *Himano*, Warra *Qallu*, Laga⁶⁸ *Gorā*, *Tahuladarē*, *Borana*, Laga *Ambo*⁶⁹ and Laga *Hidā*.⁷⁰ Huntingford provides a longer and different list according to which the *Wuchälē*, *Räyyā*, *Yaju* and other smaller fractions come under a single family, and the rest under another.⁷¹ Recent oral material has yielded yet another list of about ten fractions: 'Alī *Bēt*, *Abbay Bēt*, *Chirrachā*, Laga *Hidā*, Laga *Gorā*, Laga *Ambo*, Warra *Himano*, *Korēb*, *Rugā* and *Sagarat*.⁷² Some of the new names in this list may well represent what other lists have included as subclans, or may refer to place names. Other fractions are also known to have existed, mainly in southeastern Wallo: the *Arummā*, *Jillē*, *Fursi*, *Reqqē* and *Dawway*.⁷³ The Warra *Karrayyu*, Warra *Ilu* and Warra *Nolé'ali* presumably broke away from the "Wallo Confederation of Clans" to form the "Sādacha [Three] Confederation." This probably occurred in the early seventeenth century.⁷⁴ According to Merid, the "Wallo bands" (presumably the clans of the "Wallo Confederation") spread westwards from their base in *Gaññ* and the neighbouring districts of Amhara towards Dambiyā together with the Marawwā who had preceded them, and towards Awsā where the Warra *Dāya* had already settled.⁷⁵

⁶⁷ Bahrey in Beckingham and Huntingford, *Some Records of Ethiopia*, pp. 112, 114.

⁶⁸ *Laga*: people; Huntingford, *The Galla of Ethiopia*, p. 13, n. 12.

⁶⁹ *Ambo*: tribe; ally; ibid., p. 14, n. 13.

⁷⁰ C.W. Isenberg and J.L. Krapf, *The Journals of C.W. Isenberg and J.L. Krapf* new ed. (London, 1968), p. 324.

⁷¹ Huntingford, p. 14; Stitz, "Amhara Resettlement," p. 76.

⁷² Fekadu Begna, "A Tentative History of Wallo, 1855-1908" (unpublished B.A. thesis, Department of History, Addis Ababa University, 1972), p. 2.

⁷³ Merid, op. cit., p. 400.

⁷⁴ The first three belong to the *Tulamā*: Huntingford, op. cit., p. 13.

⁷⁵ Zergaw, "Some Aspects," p. 4.

⁷⁶ Jules Perruchon, "Notes pour l'histoire d'Ethiopie: Régne de Sarsa-Dengel ou Malak Sagad Ier (1563-1597)," *RS*, IV (1896), p. 181 (text), p. 275 (trans.).

⁷⁷ Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," pp. 248, 331; Mohammed, "The Oromo of Ethiopia," p. 247.

⁷⁸ Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 197.

⁷⁹ Merid, op. cit., p. 393; Mohammed, op. cit., pp. 272-3.

⁸⁰ Merid, p. 315; Mohammed, pp. 289-90. See also Beckingham and Huntingford, *Some Records of Ethiopia*, p. xc. According to the chronicle of Susenyos, the event took place in the 16th year of his reign: 1623; see J. Perruchon, "Notes pour l'histoire d'Ethiopie, Régne de Susenyos ou Seltan-Sagad (1607-1632)," *RS*, V (1897), p. 176 (text), p. 185 (trans.).

⁸¹ Perruchon, "Notes pour l'histoire d'Ethiopie: Le Règne de Fasiladas (Alam Sagad), de 1623 à 1667," *RS*, V/VI (1897/8), p. 91 (trans.).

⁸² Zergaw, "Some Aspects," p. 4.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Contu Rossini in Brielli, "Ricordi Storici," p. 89, n. 31.

⁷⁷ Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," p. 328, n. 1; see also Brielli, loc. cit.

the area north of the Mille became known as the *Yaju* whose territory extended up to the *Golimā* River. In the middle of the eighteenth century, the ruling dynasty of the *Yaju*, which was called the *Warra Sēk* (or *Warra Shaykh*) and had converted to Islam and claimed Arab descent, became a dominant force in Gondarine factional court politics up to the middle of the nineteenth century.

Trimingham thought that there had been considerable intermarriage between the *Yaju* and the *Afār* of *Awsā*.⁸⁷ Merid holds the view that the ancestors of the *Yaju*, who were Christian, lived in *Qawat*, *Shawā*, and that after a large number of them had adopted Islam in the time of *Grāñ*, they occupied *Angot* during his raids into *Amhara*.⁸⁸ Elsewhere Merid displayed some uncertainty as to how and when the “El-*Iju* of *Qawat*” came to settle in *Angot*,⁸⁹ though he expressed no such doubt as to their being the forefathers of the *Yaju* in *Wallo*.⁹⁰ He also stated that *Qawat* was subsequently occupied by Muslims from across the *Awāsh* and mentioned the *Yaju* claim that their ancestor was an Arab called *Shaykh ‘Umar*.

Basing himself on Merid’s conclusion, Crummey has argued that the “Galla” element within the *Yaju* ruling family and ethnic group was weak. His principal aim in doing so was to illustrate the point that ethnicity played a less prominent role in the struggle amongst the warlords of the *Zamana Masqəfet* than has been long assumed by scholars.⁹¹ But Crummey has overlooked two important points in Merid’s conclusion: firstly, what Merid had set out to do was not to disprove that the *Yaju* were Oromo, but to show that among the other Oromo clans in the region, they were the most assimilated into the Christian Semitic culture; secondly, Merid’s statement that “the *Yaju* speak Amharic” cannot be taken to mean that they spoke the language as early as the sixteenth century, as Crummey apparently assumed. He also ignores the distinction between those who came to be known as the *Yaju* and their ancestors, the “El-*Iju*”, to whom Merid was referring.

Basset suggests that the “Idjdjou” mentioned by Shihāb al-Dīn might be the same as the *Agaw* (though, as he himself says, this is unlikely) or might be some archaic form of Amharic, or even a tribe of the *Danakil*, though it is known that the *Danakil* did not play any significant role in the wars of Ahmad *Grāñ*.⁹² A recent hypothesis makes the *Yaju* the vanguard Oromo “who may have arrived in Ifat long before the sixteenth century.”⁹³

To the north of the *Yaju* were the *Rāyyā* of *Azabo* in southeastern *Tigray* and northeastern *Wallo*. They were possibly a fraction of the *Marawwā*.⁹⁴ According to a variant tradition, the *Rāyyā* Oromo were the offspring of a marriage between the eponymous ancestor of the *Tulamā* and the former wife of one Muhammad Yūsuf, possibly of *Afār* origin.⁹⁵ According to Trimingham, it was they who “dispossessed the *Dob’ā*” towards the end of the sixteenth century.⁹⁶ They were loosely organized socially and politically, and played no role in the politics of the warlord era, although they resisted direct control by the Ethiopian monarchs during the second half of the nineteenth century and afterwards.⁹⁷

Brielli collected a tradition according to which the *Arrādo*, *Arle*, *Girgiro*, *Hibana*, *Mētarro*, *Rugā* and *Tabelā* are all descended from a certain *Abono*.⁹⁸ Another tradition makes “Diko *Abono*” the grandson of *Warra Babbō*.⁹⁹ The six fractions occupied small districts in *Yaju* and *Tahuladare*, the latter situated southeast of Lake *Hayq*.

⁸⁷ Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 195. See also Huntingford, *The Galla of Ethiopia*, p. 14.

⁸⁸ Merid, “Political Geography,” p. 619.

⁸⁹ Idem, “Southern Ethiopia,” p. 138. In fact the line of argument proposed by Merid in his thesis suggests that they had moved to *Angot* prior to the campaigns of Ahmad *Grāñ*.

⁹⁰ Ibid. See also d’Abbadie, *Douce am*, I, pp. 150, 260; II, p. 201.

⁹¹ Donald Crummey, “Society and Ethnicity in the Politics of Christian Ethiopia during the *Zamana Masqəfet*,” *JAH*, VIII (1975), p. 277; Rubenson, *Survival*, p. 35 refers to the *Yaju* as being ‘allegedly’ Galla.

⁹² Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, (1938), p. 12, n. 36.

⁹³ Fondo Conti Rossini, p. 35. *Rāyyā* is also said to have been the son of *Mēchā delta Società Africana d’Italia*, (1938), p. 194. See also C. Conti Rossini, “I Galla

⁹⁴ Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 194. See also C. Conti Rossini, “I Galla

⁹⁵ Raita,” *Rivista di Studi Orientali*, 8 (1919); idem, “Uoggerà, Raita Galla e Zopul,” *Bulletino*

⁹⁶ Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 194. See also C. Conti Rossini, “I Galla

⁹⁷ For a recent study of the tradition of resistance of the *Rāyyā* Oromo to imperial rule, see Gebre Tareke, “Peasant Resistance in Ethiopia: the Case of *Weyane*,” *Journal of African History*, 25, 1 (1984), pp. 77–92, esp. 83–84, and idem, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest: Peasant revolts in the twentieth century* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 89–124.

⁹⁸ Brielli, “Recordi Storici,” p. 89.

⁹⁹ Fondo Conti Rossini, p. 23.

Still another tradition, also recorded by Brielli, makes Wallo one of the six sons of one Lällo of Dawārō who, having embraced Islam in Harar, followed Grāñ on his campaigns to north-central Ethiopia.¹⁰⁰

The other smaller subclans were the Warra Tāya, Warra Abbechū, Warra Wāyyu, Sibā, Boru Chaffā, Rūgā and Sayyo. The first three occupied the areas to the northeast of Amhara and south of Angot, while the rest settled in the region not occupied by the larger Oromo subclans.¹⁰¹

The Oromo migration and settlement in the central and eastern parts of the region under discussion had both immediate and long-term demographic and social repercussions. The impact on the culture and settlement patterns of the pre-existing communities among whom they settled is a matter that still awaits a detailed investigation.¹⁰² As Levine remarked, our knowledge about the people who were displaced or absorbed by the first waves of Oromo settlers is quite limited.¹⁰³ However, in the Wallo region, it was the Argobbā and Afār domiciled along the approaches of the eastern route taken by the early Oromo bands, as well as the Amhara and probably also other smaller groups in the historical Amhara province, who bore the brunt of the Oromo thrust in the second half of the sixteenth and during the seventeenth centuries.¹⁰⁴

The existing literature on the Oromo population movement seems to be largely concerned with their devastating raids and military successes in northern and central Ethiopia, with the rise of their influence in the courts of Gondar and Dabir Tabor in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,¹⁰⁵ and with their role in ushering in a period of the gradual decline of the Christian monarchy and in the revival of centrifugal forces. It also focusses on the reaction of the Amhara-Tegrāyan nobility and clergy to their dominant position. By contrast

¹⁰⁰ Brielli, op. cit., p. 87; cf. Abir, "Ethiopia and the Horn," p. 552, where the con-

¹⁰¹ Zergaw, "Some Aspects," pp. 5-6.

¹⁰² Thus was a timely question posed by Asmarom Legesse in his *Gada: Three Approaches to the Study of African History* (New York, 1973), p. 9.

¹⁰³ Levine, *Greater Ethiopia*, p. 80. Conti Rossini, "Uggerat, Raia Galla . . ."

¹⁰⁴ Oromo as having been a wilderness.

¹⁰⁵ For the impact of the Oromo on the region inhabited by the Danakī, see Abir, "Ethiopia and the Horn," pp. 541, 543, 554; Braukämper, "Islamic Principalities," p. 39. Abir, *Era of the Princes*, pp. 112-15; Huntingford, *The Galla of Ethiopia*, p. 21.

the nature and degree of the social intercourse between the Oromo clans and the indigenous communities of north-central Ethiopia, and the emergence and development of new political and cultural institutions, have hardly engaged the attention of scholars.¹⁰⁶ Professor Ullendorff's statement that the Oromo contributed nothing to the development of the Ethiopian culture¹⁰⁷ can be explained, among other things, in terms of the then-prevailing scholarly ignorance about, and lack of research into, the history of the people concerned.

According to Levine, the Oromo became influential in northern Ethiopia in two ways: by setting up independent political enclaves, which will be described below, and by joining the mainstream of Amhara life and court politics.¹⁰⁸ Their role in the consolidation of Islam and their efforts to preserve a certain measure of cultural identity *vis-à-vis* the encroaching imperial power and Christian way of life will also be discussed in the latter chapters.

As Crummeck has pointed out, the Oromo migration was an important factor which contributed towards the ethnic diversity of north-central Ethiopia, thereby complicating for the imperial administration the task of establishing its control over the old Amhara region.¹⁰⁹

The Oromo expansion, rather than being directly motivated by the urge to extend political domination, to collect tribute or to impose a national religious culture, occurred as the culmination of a series of "ritually prescribed" military expeditions and in search of land.¹¹⁰ After the initial period of migration involving the use of force, the various groups subordinated those initial aims to that of settling in the new areas permanently. They tended gradually to adopt certain aspects of the host cultures, or even to become fully integrated into those cultures.¹¹¹ But even in the latter case, it should not be forgotten that they introduced some elements of their own culture into

¹⁰⁶ Except in Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," pp. 416-25, 438-40, and Mohammed,

"The Oromo of Ethiopia," pp. 154-57, 163-64, 349-58.

¹⁰⁷ Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians*, p. 76.

¹⁰⁸ Levine, op. cit., p. 82.

¹⁰⁹ Crummeck, "Society and Ethnicity," p. 271. See also Robert L. Hess, *Ethiopia: the Modernization of Autocracy* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1970), p. 48.

¹¹⁰ Levine, op. cit., pp. 79, 135, 150; Markakis, *Ethiopia*, p. 16; Abir, "Ethiopia and the Horn," p. 544; Mohammed, "The Oromo of Ethiopia," p. 229. These expeditions took place in times of changes of the traditional leadership within the Oromo political organization, whenever a new generation of warrior-leaders assumed power at predetermined and regular intervals.

¹¹¹ Levine, op. cit., p. 80.

the social and religious life of the peoples with whom they came into contact, to such an extent that this influence is still visible today. In addition to their military superiority,¹¹² the Oromo appear to have been able to mix with people of other cultures with comparatively little difficulty.¹¹³ As Merid has pointed out, the resettlement, for instance, of the Warantishā in Achaifar and Gojjām, and their conversion to Christianity, "marked their initiation into highland sedentary culture."¹¹⁴

In the view of Arnould d'Abbadie, the Oromo settlers, in spite of their initial numerical weakness, were able to turn the indigenous people in the agricultural areas into "serfs" or tribute-paying subjects whom they allowed to work on the land while the Oromo themselves assumed the responsibility for the defence of their domains.¹¹⁵ We do not know if the kind of relationship between the Oromo and the conquered peoples in the south, as described by Merid, also prevailed in the region which is the focus of the present study. He has explained in some detail how the Oromo modified the indigenous *gabbār* institution by turning the peasants, the local nobility and soldiers into tribute-paying subjects whom they divided into groups attached to the different Oromo clans, and organized them into separate age-sets. They were made to look after the cattle belonging to the Oromo and to assist in military raids.¹¹⁶ In Wallo the new Oromo warlords also monopolized political power by gradually undermining and eventually displacing the local rulers. Hence a number of petty military aristocratic families came to control an extensive territory within the region to the south and northeast of the Bashlo river. It was this area which later became the nucleus of chiefdoms and principalities that subsequently emerged and flourished. As the dominant social and political group, they imposed tributes in cattle

¹¹² D'Abbadie, *Douze ans*, II, p. 110, wrote: "... ces Ilmormas pouvaient former, si l'autorité était concentrée dans une seule main, une armée de plus 80,000 hommes, cavalier en grande partie."

¹¹³ Levine, op. cit., p. 91.

¹¹⁴ Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," p. 512.

¹¹⁵ D'Abbadie, *Douze ans*, II, pp. 110, 119, 204; Markakis, *Ethiopia*, p. 56; Abir, "Ethiopia and the Horn," p. 416. On the objection raised against the use of the term "serf" to north/central Ethiopian peasants, see Gene Ellis, "The Feudal Paradigm as a Hindrance to Understanding Ethiopia," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 14, 2 (1976), p. 282; Crumney, "Abyssinian Feudalism," p. 129.

¹¹⁶ Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," pp. 416-24; Mohammed, "The Oromo of Ethiopia," pp. 164, 347, 349-51.

and grain on the subject populations. There must also have been extensive alienation of land belonging to the previous inhabitants by the different ruling families.

In spite of all the tensions, the new settlers did not remain for long as distinct groups. They gradually began to intermarry and to adopt either Christianity or Islam. In fact the process of cultural assimilation seems to have gathered momentum from a very early date. This is corroborated by some of the traditions collected by Brielli¹¹⁷ which stress these interactions in spite of the disruptive effects of acculturation of the preceding Oromo settlers.¹¹⁸

The distinctiveness of the Yajju and Wallo has been underscored by Abir¹¹⁹ and emphasized by others.¹²⁰ However, it should not be taken literally as it probably was significant only during the early period of settlement when the migrants must have felt the need for keeping a clear demarcation between themselves and all others, and used this as a basis for the imposition of their rule in the conquered areas from where they expanded further into Lāstā and Amhara.¹²¹ In fact the capacity for assimilation displayed by the Yajju and Wallo clans has been mentioned by Merid and others.¹²² In this respect they do not seem to differ from other Oromo groups.¹²³

D'Abbadie made the interesting observation that the Oromo assimilated whatever survived of the ancient hereditary land tenure system which had already been undermined by the warlords of the eighteenth century—ostensibly for the purpose of administrative centralization. He stated that the experience which some of the Wallo notables had acquired in the Gondarine court, where they had received and bestowed positions of power, titles and decorations, had stimulated the process towards the concentration of authority in Wallo in the hands of certain families, leading to a social structure he described as "feudalism" and tempered by a "patriarchal" system that suited a "military and fierce" regime. He further noted that the

¹¹⁷ See below, pp. 26-27.

¹¹⁸ See above, p. 15.

¹¹⁹ Abir, "Ethiopia and the Horn," p. 567.

¹²⁰ Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 107; Levine, *Greater Ethiopia*, p. 82; Markakis, *Ethiopia*, p. 53.

¹²¹ Abir, loc. cit.

¹²² Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," pp. 139, 585; Markakis, loc. cit.; Levine, loc. cit.

¹²³ D'Abbadie, *Douze ans*, II, p. 200; cf. Trimingham, loc. cit., where they are said to have "kept their Galla identity".

influence of the way of life of their Christian neighbours made impossible the preservation of this system for a long period of time.¹²⁴ Although this analysis applies more to the period after the middle of the eighteenth century, it is probable that the situation that he described had begun to take shape in the preceding century. Similarly, Conti Rossini's study of the Rāyyā Oromo shows that it was under Christian influence, though also as a consequence of the coming of Tigrayan settlers and the spread of Islam, that the Rāyyā abandoned their traditional political organization, some of their rituals, and, above all, their communal landholding system.¹²⁵

In those areas of Wallo settled by the Oromo clans, we can conceptualize several stages in the formation and development of new social relations and aristocracies from the second half of the sixteenth up to the middle of the nineteenth century.

a) an early and unstable stage of short duration during which the Oromo established themselves by force as military conquerors and chiefly elicts, together with their followers and dependents whom they settled in areas adjacent to their main military camps. Further forays into the surrounding territories were launched on a more or less regular basis. At this stage one can envisage the Oromo still maintaining the basic essentials of their traditional social and political system based on the *gadā* (generation-grading) within each of the numerous enclaves which they carved out in the northern and eastern sub-provinces of Amhara. It seems more likely than not that this period, which can be tentatively placed between 1580 and 1620, was characterized by relatively strong tribal or clan solidarity during which inter- and intra-clan feuds were the exception rather than the rule. Levine's statement that the "Galla conception of an inclusive collectivity has been based either on a sense of common descent... or of inclusion in a narrowly defined tribal unit,"¹²⁶ does not seem to take into consideration the fact that coalitions of different Oromo clans were formed for the purpose of raiding Amhara and Bagēnder, especially in the late eighteenth century. There were also several instances of mutual understanding among clans whereby some of them moved out of certain areas for others to move in, and of groups

who, having encountered other Oromo clans already settled in their line of movement, did not try to take over the latter's land but instead returned to their original bases. When, for example, the Waramiñshā encountered the Akkachu and the Wallo beyond the Walaqā River, they retreated to the province of Walaqā.¹²⁷ The master-subject relationship between the Oromo conquerors and the vanquished peoples in the south, mentioned earlier, might not have prevailed for long in the north owing to the rapid process of assimilation of the Oromo settlers and their interaction with the Christian and Muslim populations—a process which started very early in their migration and settlement.¹²⁸

Although, as Levine stated, the *gadā* system was undermined by the exigencies of the new environment and other factors such as distance from the traditional ritual centres, the emergence of warriors as ruling chiefs, and the introduction of Islam,¹²⁹ the resulting social changes did not promote the founding of centralized states of any consequence by the Wallo and the Yajū at this early stage. This occurred later under the growing influence of trade and Islam or Christianity. b) an intermediate phase (ca. 1620–1700) when the relations of the Oromo with the indigenous communities became regularized and were reinforced through dynastic intermarriage and other mechanisms. The end of the initial hostilities afforded a breathing space for both sides, especially for the new settlers who sometimes found themselves cut off from other Oromo clans and were eager to accept truces.¹³⁰ On the other hand, ruthless pillaging of Oromo-occupied areas in Amhara and Angot by Susenyos, before he became king, and by other marauders in the 1620s, prompted the indigenous inhabitants and the Oromo to form defensive alliances.¹³¹ This was also the period in which the seeds of the formation of rival Oromo confederations were planted.¹³² These rivalries and alliances resulted from the fact that each assimilated chieftain or clan began to link its economic and political interests to those of one or another of the

¹²⁷ Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," p. 415.

¹²⁸ Cf. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 94. He wrote that the Oromo remained

distinct until the 19th century. Further on (pp. 106–7), he addes: "they [the Oromo]... absorbed many Abyssinian social and political institutions... At the same time... [they] kept their... identity..."; also pp. 188, 193, 197.

¹²⁹ Levine, op. cit., pp. 144, 158–59.

¹³⁰ Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," p. 331.

¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 513, 515, 16.

¹³² Brielli, "Ricordi Storici," p. 90, n. 32.

¹²⁴ D'Abbadie, op. cit., pp. 110, 201. On the Oromo adoption of the traditional landholding system, see also Trimingham, op. cit., p. 193; Markakis, loc. cit.

¹²⁵ Conti Rossini, "Uoggerà, Raia Galla...," pp. 15–16.

¹²⁶ Levine, op. cit., pp. 135–36, 156.

indigenous ruling or warrior families, and to regard claims on the clan's territory or tribute imposed on it by other powerful clans as detrimental to its own position.¹³³ Ultimately, acculturation engendered internal ethnic differentiation among the Wallo Oromo.

During this stage, the Wallo Oromo continued their irruptions into the Christian territories and their inroads into the political life of the imperial court. In the early seventeenth century, the Wallo clans threw in their lot with Susenyos against Yēzeqob. In 1619/20 the Jille and Marawwā groups invaded Bagēmder but were defeated. Subsequently, the Wallo were able to consolidate their possessions between Lästā in the north, Amārā Säyent in the west, and Manz in the south. In the early 1660s, the Warra Himano launched a large-scale raid into Bagēmder but were beaten back.¹³⁴

c) a third phase (ca. 1700–1750) which was characterized by the acquisition and distribution of booty and tribute by competing Oromo groups in order to smooth over conflicts within each group, and also to strengthen their capacity to exploit the rapid decline of the Gondarine monarchy, to whose shadowy existence they had paid only lip service. They therefore intensified their raids into Christian Amhara territory which eventually brought them to the court of Gondar where many were recruited as practorian guards in the palace and eventually became arbiters in the factional power struggles which were then raging in the capital.

d) a period of internal reorganization (ca. 1750–1850) that was associated with the increasing influence of Islam and with the development of trade. It witnessed the rise to power of the Yajju ruling family and other local dynasties in Wallo proper.

e) the final phase (ca. 1850–1889) which was marked by increasing pressure exerted on the Wallo by the centralizing forces under Tewodros II (r. 1855–68), Yohannes IV (r. 1872–89) and Menilek II (r. 1889–1913), and by the eventual eclipse of Wallo as a regional and dynastic centre.

Brielli refers to a tradition which illustrates the manner in which an Oromo clan adapted itself to the local conditions of the areas where it first settled. It also testifies to the fact that the settlement of some of the Oromo clans was not always achieved exclusively by violent means but also through a calculated process of peaceful

infiltration. Towards 1700 a small Oromo group from Arsi in southern Ethiopia left their homeland and, together with their herds of cattle, followed the route along the edge of the escarpment, and settled in Garfā, east of the Challaqā River. Among them was a Muslim cleric called Godānā Bābbo who possessed his own herd. Later on, having presumably assumed a chiefly role, he was able to secure the goodwill of the rulers of Sagarrāt and Tahuladarē through his munificence and after his marrying into the local ruling family. In the course of time he built up his power and influence over the surrounding populations. By the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Godānā's descendants had established an independent Muslim principality centred in northern Amhara south of the Bashlo River. The rulers of this dynasty, called Māmmadoch, later constructed a genealogy claiming Arab noble ancestry.¹³⁵

For the indigenous Muslim communities in Wallo, the most important consequence of the Oromo raids and eventual settlement in their midst in the late sixteenth century was the disruption of the process of Islamization which, as will be discussed in the next chapter, had been going on for some time, and had received a new impetus during the time of Grāñ. By weakening and isolating these communities from other centres of Islam like Ifat and Harar, the early Oromo settlers delayed the process of the further consolidation of Islam in the region, although within a period of a hundred years, some of the ruling Oromo elites themselves were to become the champions of Islam.

On the other hand, one important long-term outcome of the Oromo settlement, from the point of view of this study, was their early Islamization,¹³⁶ and their active role in the subsequent consolidation and expansion of Islam not only within their own immediate territory, but also in other areas under their domination such as Bagēmder.¹³⁷ They thus helped in transforming the status of local Islam from that of a religion of disparate communities to that of a dynastic and regional ideology. Scholars such as Tringham¹³⁸ had proposed a fairly late date (mid-eighteenth century) for the adoption of Islam by the Oromo of Wallo. This might have been due to the

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 91. See also Chapter IV.

¹³⁶ Tringham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 106.

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 110–11; Abir, *Era of the Princes*, p. 113.

¹³⁸ Tringham, op. cit., pp. 107, 188, 193, 197.

influence of the traditions collected by nineteenth-century European travellers such as Krapf who wrote that the Wallo embraced Islam as late as the eighteenth century.¹³⁹ However, the statement made by Ferret and Galinier that the "Wallo-Gallas had abandoned their ancestral faith a long time ago"¹⁴⁰ does not exclude the possibility, and even strongly implies, that their Islamization took place at a much earlier date. Moreover, the hypothesis of a mid-eighteenth-century date overlooks the early assimilation of local culture by the Oromo. It is therefore not unlikely that their Islamization began earlier than has been assumed: in the period beginning from the second half of the seventeenth century. Trimmingham himself wrote that the Wallo took Islam from the indigenous Muslims of the region.¹⁴¹ Moreover, the Yaju—or their ancestors—were already Muslim at the time of the Oromo settlement.¹⁴² Only in the case of the Rayya group is it known beyond doubt that their Islamization occurred rather late: in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁴³

The tradition collected by Brielli that makes a certain "Wallo" the head of an Oromo clan responsible for introducing Islam into the region from Harar at the time of Grāñ's campaigns¹⁴⁴ is possibly a projection of a nineteenth-century tradition about the coming of a mystical order, and therefore need not be taken seriously. So also is the claim made by a recent writer that the Oromo migration "caused . . . the rise of Islam in the plateau."¹⁴⁵

Another crucial aspect of Islam in Wallo was heavily influenced by the culture of the Oromo. Many of the features of traditional belief system and practice which are recognizable in nineteenth-century Islam in the region, and which the contemporary Muslim reformers

¹³⁹ J. Lewis Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours during an Eighteen Years' Residence in Eastern Africa* (London, 1850), p. 83; D'Abbadie, *Douze ans*, II, p. 200, who asserted that their conversion to Islam took place at about the same time under the influence of Harari clerics.

¹⁴⁰ P.V. Ferret and J.-G. Gallinier, *Voyage en Abyssinie, dans les provinces du Tigré, du Samen et de l'Amhara* (Paris, 1847), 3 vols., II, p. 328.

¹⁴¹ Trimmingham, op. cit., p. 193, n. 1.

¹⁴² Merid, "Southern Ethiopia," p. 139, n. 2.

¹⁴³ Conti Rossini, "Uggerat, Raya Galla . . .", p. 12; Trimmingham, op. cit., p. 194. The British Consul at Massawa reported that even as late as the mid-nineteenth century, the Rāyyā had not yet converted to Islam: Public Record Office, FO 1/8 f. 3224, Enclosure to Plowden's letter dated Massawa, 9 July 1854.

¹⁴⁴ Brielli, "Ricordi Storici," p. 87.

¹⁴⁵ Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea*, p. 169.

attempted to eradicate,¹⁴⁶ were largely of Oromo origin, although some, like the *zīr* (spirit-possession cult), might have been survivals from the culture of other Kushitic groups such as the Agaw.¹⁴⁷ The next chapter will examine the nature and mode of the process of Islamization in Ethiopia in general and in Wallo in particular, and discuss the traditions of Muslim communities in Wallo in the context of that process.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ISLAMIZATION OF ETHIOPIA AND OF WALLO

The present chapter is a discussion of some aspects of the introduction and expansion of Islam within the broader Ethiopian context. It also contains a brief examination into the traditions of Islamization of the Wallo region and an account of the distribution of Sunnī Islam and the Sūfī orders. It attempts to demonstrate that the conventional view on the spread of Islam from the coast to the hinterland postulates an excessively spontaneous association between the expansion of trade (or, alternatively, the influence of state power) and the diffusion of Islam, and fails to take into consideration other factors such as the prominent role of indigenous Muslim clerics and scholars, the advent of immigrant families from the H̄ijāz and Yemen, the periodic arrival of yet larger groups of Muslims in the wake of political and military conflicts in the Islamic heartland, and the slow infiltration of other Muslim elements.

Although the Wallo traditions of Islamization do not offer a neat chronology and a comprehensive historical coverage, they reflect local perceptions on the coming of Islam and its development in the region, and point to the variety of directions through which Islamic influences steadily penetrated across the fringe zones separating the plateau from the lowlands, and eventually into the highlands themselves. A later chapter will deal more extensively with the role of the mystical orders in the emergence of popular and militant Islam in the nineteenth century.

Trimingham made the observation that the history of the development of Islam in northeast Africa was shaped by the presence of a predominant Christian culture and state which supposedly acted as a barrier against the expansion of the religion into the rest of Africa.¹ While the validity of the second part of the hypothesis is open to question, there is no doubt that the history of Islam in

Ethiopia is intimately connected with that of an initially accommodating, but progressively hostile, Christian kingdom. It is equally significant to bear in mind that, in spite of this potential antagonism and occasional friction, Islam succeeded in gradually establishing itself in the region and in becoming an integral part of Ethiopian culture.

A chronological outline of the process of the penetration and establishment of Islam as reflected in the existing literature is provided in a later section of this chapter.² Here other relevant themes and aspects of that process will be treated.

The point of departure for the discussion is the *hijra* to Aksum. The traditions which speak about the conversion to Islam of the contemporary Aksumite ruler, although not intrinsically improbable, have been used by both Arab and Ethiopian Muslims as a pious interpretation of Islamization aimed at bolstering the latter's status in the eyes of other Muslim and non-Muslim inhabitants of the time.³ Nevertheless, it is clear that the collapse of Aksumite effective control over the Red Sea coast and its trade, beginning from the middle of the eighth century, provided Islam with an opportunity for its expansion into the Ethiopian region.⁴ In other words, one way or the other, the history of the introduction of Islam can be followed in the context of the history of Aksum. It is conceivable that, even before the end of the seventh century, Muslims as individuals or groups had crossed the sea to settle along the coastal areas. The traditions of origin of highland Muslim communities, and of the shiikhdoms of the lowlands, to whose history we shall return at a later stage, seem to refer to these pre-eighth-century immigrants. Dombrowski has recently suggested that the expansion of Islam in northeast Africa occurred later, and was slower, than in North Africa.⁵ But his interpretation invites a critical evaluation on two grounds: firstly, it does not take into account the significant and well-attested role of the Red Sea as a channel of communication and route of migration for Semitic-speaking peoples from southwest and south Arabia to the African coast, beginning from pre-Christian times, and, secondly,—and more importantly—the expansion of Islam, both

¹ Trimingham, op. cit., p. xiv. See also Abraham Demoz, "Moslems and Islam

in Ethiopic Literature," *JES*, X, 1 (1972), p. 1 and Amadeus Franz Dombrowski,

"The Growth and Consolidation of Muslim Power in the Horn of Africa: Some Observations," *Archiv Orientální*, 51 (1983), p. 66.

² See pp. 58–59.

³ Hussein Ahmed, "Aksum in Muslim Historical Traditions," *JES*, XXIX, 2 (1997), pp. 47–66.

⁴ Trimingham, op. cit., p. 47; Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 43.

⁵ Dombrowski, op. cit., p. 55.

as a religious and cultural system, need not be accompanied or preceded by military conquest or the establishment of a Muslim state. Historically, the expansion of Muslim military power has speeded up the process of the diffusion of the faith in many parts of the world, and this applies to certain periods of Ethiopian history itself, but it is not a necessary condition for the expansion of Islam.⁶

However, Dombrowski seems to subscribe to the view that the spread of Islam in Africa was achieved largely through military conquest and the formation of Islamic states. Hence he has brought forward the period when Islam secured a foothold in the interior of Ethiopia and the Horn to the tenth and eleventh centuries since he wrote that the Horn had "escaped the first waves of Islamic conquest."⁷ Indeed this is a major shortcoming of many commentators on Islam in Africa. They fail to distinguish between the rise of Islam as a *political factor* which, as Tadesse remarked, was a post-tenth century development,⁸ from its earlier and largely pacific penetration and entrenchment as a *religion and a culture*.

Dombrowski is not unaware of the mechanisms that contributed most to the introduction of Islam, namely, cultural diffusion as well as migration from across the Red Sea. As a matter of fact he discusses them and refers to the works of Cerulli, Trimingham and Rankhurst.⁹ But he does not seem to have considered those mechanisms as part of a continuous process that started well before the eleventh century. He also suggests that it was the power vacuum created by the fall of Aksum that allowed Islam to expand into the Horn of Africa. Interestingly enough, this is the reverse of the widely-held notion that the rise of Islam caused the decline of Aksum, and that the raids of the Beja in the north, and the attack on Aksum by the pagan queen of Dāmot, to which Dombrowski draws attention,¹⁰ merely precipitated Aksum's fall.

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that the situation in the Aksumite kingdom after, and despite, the collapse of its maritime power was not as precarious as had long been believed.¹¹ It is likely that the increasing influence of Islam on the Red Sea littoral of Africa, and the decline of Aksum as a naval and commercial power in the Horn, were two parallel developments, instead of one directly affecting the other. Therefore, the penetration of Islam into the Ethiopian region most probably preceded the collapse of the Aksumite state and certainly outlived it. But Dombrowski's statement that Christianity spread from the core to the periphery while Islam expanded from the periphery towards the centre,¹² is a fairly accurate description of the two historical processes.

Islam gained access to Ethiopia especially through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden coastal areas which were remote from any direct and effective control of the Aksumite state,¹³ and indirectly, through converts from among the nomadic populations of the deserts of the Horn. The earliest contact between Islam and the Ethiopian hinterland was forged by traders from the coast and the nomadic elements of the interior. Throughout the centuries the two groups continued to play the role of carriers of Islam. However, the task of establishing Islam firmly and of nurturing Islamic culture and institutions fell on the more enterprising sections of the sedentary communities domiciled in the ecological zone that marked the transition from the barren lowlands to the fertile plateau.

The development of trade and the proliferation of commercial routes, both along the northern axis of the Aksumite domain in the direction of the Dahlak islands, and in that part of the hinterland facing the eastern littoral in the south, and the activities of Muslim traders who were officially tolerated by the Christian state (although not allowed the free exercise of their faith),¹⁴ all prepared the ground for the establishment of small trading settlements which also served

⁶ For an interesting parallel, see J.D. Peel, "Conversion and Tradition in Two African Societies: Ijebu and Buganda," *Past and Present*, 77 (1977), p. 112: "... while an increase in Christian conversion in Africa is universally associated with colonialisation, it does not seem that military conquest is generally associated with rapid or intense conversion".

⁷ Dombrowski, op. cit., p. 59.

⁸ Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 50, but cf. op. cit., p. 44 and "Ethiopia, the Red Sea . . .", p. 103, where he noted that before the tenth century, Islam had made little headway as a proselytizing force.

⁹ Dombrowski, loc. cit.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 61.

¹¹ Tadesse, *Church and State*, pp. 32, 33, 39; idem, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea . . .", p. 98.

¹² Dombrowski, op. cit., p. 67. His criticism of Cerulli, who drew the analogy between the spread of Islam and that of Christianity, is not valid, since Cerulli was only stressing the commercial aspects of the introduction and consolidation of both faiths, and not their relationship *vis-à-vis* the political establishment, as Dombrowski suggests. The relevant passage in Cerulli's "L'Islam Etiopico" in his *L'Islam di ieri e di oggi* (Roma, 1971), p. 115 and n. 11 explicitly speaks of "an analogy".

¹³ Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 43.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 44.

as centres for the diffusion of Islam.¹⁵ It would be implausible to suggest that the activities of the Muslim residents of such centres had no impact on the local population: it is very likely that the ban on public Islamic worship was imposed and implemented precisely because of the progress (no matter how imperceptible or slow it might have been) that Islam was making in terms of winning converts from among the local people.¹⁶

According to Trimmingham the earliest period of organized propagation of Islam in northeast Africa was between the tenth and twelfth century. He associates this with the "slow progress" of Islam among the Bējā in the north,¹⁷ and with the expansion of the slave trade which gave an impetus to the rise of coastal settlements extending from Sawakin in the north to Zanzibar in the south.¹⁸

Tadesse has suggested a connection between the emergence of Fātimid power in Egypt, especially their methods of proselytization on the one hand, and the increasing militancy of Muslims in Ethiopia and the Horn at about the same time, on the other. But he does not show whether or not there is a direct link between the two developments through, for instance, the existence of Fātimid propagandists and teachers in Ethiopia. He only refers to the fact that Fātimid influence led to the revival of the Red Sea trade.¹⁹ In fact he made the conclusion that the Egyptian-Fātimid claim to be the natural protectors of the interests of Ethiopian Muslims was largely a fiction and played no crucial role in the expansion of Islam in Ethiopia.²⁰ Rather it was the influence of indigenous Muslims, through their control of medium- and long-distance commerce and through other activities, that brought about the consolidation of Islam as a political factor in the region after the tenth century.²¹

¹⁵ Trimmingham, op. cit., p. 138.

¹⁶ Tadesse, loc. cit.

¹⁷ Trimmingham, op. cit., p. 60. The discovery by Cerulli of the chronicle of the "Sultanate of Shawāwā" has considerably pushed the time-depth of the presence of organized Muslim states in Ethiopia. On the objection to the dating of the foundation of this state, see Tadesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea . . .", p. 106. He proposed the early twelfth century: op. cit., pp. 107, 139.

¹⁸ Trimmingham, op. cit., p. 61.

¹⁹ Tadesse, *Church and State*, pp. 44–45. See also Abir, *Egypt and the Red Sea*, p. 11.

²⁰ Tadesse, op. cit., p. 50; cf. idem, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea . . .", pp. 104–5. Egyptian rulers used to put pressure on the representatives of the Coptic Church residing in Ethiopia to use their influence with the Ethiopian kings to adopt a more conciliatory and positive policy towards Ethiopian Muslims.

²¹ Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 50.

One of the earliest commentators on the emergence of Islam in Ethiopia was Guérinot. While discussing the progress of Islam in "Abissinia", he put forward three factors that determined the pace of Islamization: the country's potential as a source of exotic and exportable goods, which attracted foreign (and Muslim) merchants; conquest by warlike peoples (from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century); and the arrival of immigrants seeking asylum.²² He hinted at the possibility of the coming, in the post-*hijra* period, of chiefly families who imposed their rule on the local people and thus established ephemeral statelets.²³

Subsequent writers on Islam in Ethiopia have stressed the factors mentioned by Guérinot. But Cerulli's analysis of the mechanisms by which Islam spread in Ethiopia must be singled out as a remarkable attempt to bring together the various factors under a single model.²⁴

Cerulli has suggested a number of hypothetical phases of Islamization which are worthy of our consideration here. Perhaps the most interesting of the situations he postulated is an early period of Islamic influence during which the nascent indigenous Muslim community consisted of two social groups: an elite of clerics trained in the Arab heartland in Islamic jurisprudence and other related fields of study, and what he called "the mass of the population" whose conversion to Islam was more politically and "nationally" motivated, and whose Islam was therefore superficial.²⁵

But this aspect of Cerulli's model fails to explain certain crucial points: firstly, the sources upon which it is constructed were compiled after the thirteenth century and consequently cannot fully explain conditions before that period. In fact there is a substantial corpus of archaeological and documentary evidence which strongly suggests the establishment of Islam and the formation of Muslim communities and states prior to the thirteenth century.²⁶ Secondly, while this part of Cerulli's model might throw light on the social consequences of the advent of Islam for the indigenous society, it does not make clear the nature of the earliest encounter between Islam and the local

²² A. Guérinot, "L'Islam et l'Abysinie," *Revue du Monde Musulman*, XXXIV (1917/18), pp. 5–6.

²³ Ibid., p. 9.

²⁴ Enrico Cerulli, "L'Islam en Ethiopie: sa signification historique et ses méthodes," *Correspondance d'Orient*, 5 (1961), pp. 323–29.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 323–24.

²⁶ See *nīfa*, pp. 38 and 59.

people; nor does it offer us a true picture of the modes of Islamization.

An important factor to which Cerulli draws attention is the role of popular literature composed in the indigenous languages and used as instructional manuals.²⁷ But the example used to illustrate this aspect comes from a much later period, and while such works might have served to maintain and preserve conformity to Islamic orthodoxy, they would hardly have been adequate to win the earliest converts to Islam.

In analyzing the mechanisms of Islamic diffusion in southern and southwestern Ethiopia during the nineteenth century, Cerulli has emphasized the importance of two elements: trade and the mystical orders. The attention he paid to the latter was indeed a very significant step forward in the study of the internal factors of Islamization. He recognized the fact that the establishment and the increase in the number and influence of trading stations intensified the expansion of Islam since they also operated as centres of Islamic teaching and propagation. Indeed he cited two late nineteenth-century examples to highlight the point. Even more interesting was his discussion of the case of the Warij to show how a Muslim group, whose typical members were traders by profession, was able to extend its activities into the Oromo regions, and how its gradual linguistic assimilation into the indigenous culture paved the way for the dissemination of Islam.²⁸ As for the religious brotherhoods, Cerulli underlined the crucial role which they played in the further expansion of Islam through the establishment of educational institutions and the founding of shrines. The leaders of the mystical brotherhoods kept a low profile while carrying out their preaching in order to allay suspicions that they might entertain political ambitions, and this was one of the keys to their rapid success.²⁹ However, Cerulli did not bring into his discussion the fact that the same two carriers of Islam—clerics and traders—were also active in north and central Ethiopia as well. The poems recited by pagan Oromo, which he quotes, and which he regards as a reflection of the difficulties faced by Muslim preachers in the nineteenth century,³⁰ are also very revealing from another

point of view: they demonstrate the persistence of traditional—non-Muslim as well as non-Christian—beliefs and practices among the local communities.

In an earlier work on Islam in East Africa, Cerulli identified several zones of Islamic expansion, each having its own distinct feature: the northern and central highlands where the Christian kingdom resisted for centuries the raids of the Muslim states; western Ethiopia where Islam was superimposed on paganism; and Somalia whose Islam was connected to “migratory and commercial currents from the basin of the Indian Ocean.”³¹ The inadequacies inherent in his classification, of which the author himself was keenly aware, have been discussed elsewhere.³² Suffice it to emphasize at this juncture that his classification does not take into account the long presence of Islam and Muslim communities in the north.

At the beginning of his observations, Cerulli analyzed in considerable detail a sixteenth-century polemical work whose author, an apostate from Islam and abbot of the monastery of Dabra Libānos in northwest Shawā, had attempted to refute some of the central doctrines of Islam.³³ At the end of his analysis, Cerulli stated that the existence and polemical character of the work reflects the pluralistic and syncretistic nature of the religious culture of Ethiopia.³⁴ This characterization of the religious culture as it then existed was also based on his study of the chronology of a local Arabic account of the earliest Muslim shiekdom in eastern Shawā which had enabled him to date to the first half of the seventh century the arrival of groups of Arab emigrants consisting of both traders and men of religion. Having overcome the local chiefs, they were able to establish dynasties of their own and to impose their rule upon the indigenous populations.³⁵ This finds confirmation in oral traditions about the origin of Muslim communities in the area, and reinforces the argument that emphasizes the role of traders—in combination with clerics—in the diffusion of Islam. So one may say that the only serious problem with Cerulli’s approach is his tendency to apply his model only to the development of Islam in southern Ethiopia, and his reluc-

²⁷ Cerulli, op. cit., pp. 324–26.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 327. On the Warij, see also Merid, “Population Movements,” p. 270.

²⁹ Cerulli, op. cit., p. 328. See also his “Islam in East Africa” in A.J. Arberry (ed.), *Religion in the Middle East: Three Religions in Conflict and Conflict* (Cambridge, 1969), II, p. 219.

³⁰ Idem, “L’Islam en Ethiopie,” p. 328.

³¹ Idem, “L’Islam nell’Africa Orientale” in *L’Islam di ieri e di oggi*, p. 99.

³² Hussein, “The Historiography of Islam,” p. 28.

³³ On this, see E.J. van Donzel (trans./cd.), *Angaza Amīn (La Porte de la Foi)* (Leiden, 1969).

³⁴ Cerulli, “L’Islam nell’Africa Orientale,” op. cit., p. 103.

³⁵ Idem, “L’Islam Etiopico,” op. cit., p. 115.

tance to conceive of a similar process in the north. Yet the earliest Muslim state, the Sultanate of Shawā, had a closer geographical, ethnic and cultural affinity with its northern and northwestern neighbours than with the southwest.

Cerulli cites two factors which, in his view, might have acted as barriers against the expansion of Islam from eastern Shawā to the north and west: first, a political factor, in the shape of the Christian kingdom; second, the Christian areas settled by the Amhara communities.³⁶ But although the Christian Amhara might have been an obstacle, there were also the Muslim Amhara and the Argobbā, the latter being the predominant element within the Muslim community of eastern Shawā and Wallo and who were speakers of a South Ethio-Semitic language closely related to Amharic.³⁷

Cerulli's study of popular pious songs, which he himself had collected in the early twentieth century,³⁸ was perhaps the only work in which he properly acknowledged the importance of the role played by Muslims in the development of an indigenous Muslim culture in the north and central plateau. As for the genealogical traditions of the ruling house of Ifat, and those of its predecessor, which claim Sharhan ancestry, Cerulli described them as indications of the "aspiration of Ethiopian Islam to link itself to the great history of Muslim expansion."³⁹ They also testify to the largely peaceful character of the expansion of Islam in those areas.

According to Trimingham, outside the various settlements and commercial centres of the coastal belt, Islam established itself in northern Ethiopia at a very early date. Epigraphic evidence helps to substantiate this.⁴⁰ Funerary inscriptions in southern Tigray strongly hint at the existence of local Muslim communities in the early eleventh century.⁴¹ Although very little is known about the process by which these communities came into existence, their establishment at such an early date is an indication that Islam spread from the coast into

the Ethiopian hinterland not only from Zeila and from other points further north, through the Harar plateau and the southern Afar territory to Ifat,⁴² but also from several points on the Red Sea coast towards the northern and central plateau. It might also indicate that the Dahlak islands were an important centre of diffusion of Islam. This would go against received views which maintain that the open propagation of Islam was very restricted in the north,⁴³ and that the external and internal trade with and through the islands, though very important from the strictly economic point of view,⁴⁴ was nevertheless of minimal significance for the spread of Islam.⁴⁵ Tadesse's work has challenged such received views. He especially mentions the Dahlak islands and other coastal settlements in connection with trade and dates the beginning of this trade from the eighth and ninth centuries. He also refers to market villages and conversions to Islam in increasing number in the important commercial centres⁴⁶ from an early date. It is in this context that the presence of the Muslim communities must be seen, although, due to the paucity of sources, it is difficult to follow either their development or their apparent decline in subsequent centuries.

Agents of Islamization: the Role of Preachers and Traders

The conventional view is that, as elsewhere in Muslim Africa, the primary agents for the cultivation and diffusion of Islam in Ethiopia were traders and other categories of travellers, as well as nomadic groups—a point alluded to earlier.⁴⁷ Trimingham wrote: "Arab traders, artisans and adventurers were the chief medium of Islamic expansion; and coming as they did as individuals and not as tribes they naturally lived in close touch with the natives, adopted their language instead of imposing Arabic, and intermarried with them."⁴⁸ Such is the position held by current scholarship on the Islamization process in the region.

³⁶ Ibid.
³⁷ Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 52; idem, "The Horn of Africa . . .", pp. 427, 432; "Ethiopia, the Red Sea . . .", p. 147.

³⁸ E. Cerulli, "Canti amarici dei Musulmani e dei Cristiani dell'Etiopia," op. cit., p. 246.

³⁹ Idem, "L'Islam Etiopico," op. cit., p. 116.

⁴⁰ Trimingham, op. cit., p. 66.

⁴¹ Ibid., n. 2; Tadesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea . . .", p. 122; B.G. Martin,

"Mahdism, Muslim Clerics, and Holy Wars in Ethiopia, 1300–1600," *Proceedings of the First United States Conference on Ethiopian Studies*, p. 92.

⁴² Trimingham, op. cit., p. 66.

⁴³ Tadesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea . . .", pp. 105, 121, 122; Martin, loc. cit.

⁴⁴ Trimingham, op. cit., p. 65; Tadesse, *Church and State*, pp. 44, 46.

⁴⁵ Trimingham, op. cit., p. 61; Tadesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea . . .", pp. 118–21.

⁴⁶ Tadesse, *Church and State*, pp. 44, 46.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 43; idem, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea . . .", p. 103.

⁴⁸ Trimingham, op. cit., p. 139.

While this may explain the early stages of the process of the introduction of Islam, it hardly satisfies the historian's desire to know precisely how and by whom Islam spread amongst the local people, nor his wish to know exactly what methods of preaching the new faith were adopted by traders and other social elements which resulted in the spread of Islam. This section attempts to examine the question of whether or not it is possible for the historian to advance further in the pursuit of those two lines of enquiry. But the detailed discussion of the role of clerics is reserved for a later chapter.

Levtzion has claimed, in a more general context, that the material on the experience of conversion to Islam is thin because Muslim historiography developed "only after Islam had been established in a region and a class of literati had emerged."⁵¹ He added that sources composed several centuries later tended to have had legal rather than chronological/historical significance.⁵² Yet information on the experience of Islamization as lived by those who were converted is preserved—or rather represented/reconstructed—in the Ethiopian case, at least, by oral tradition, and by a few scattered references in written documents of local and foreign authorship. As to the spatial and chronological patterns of the process of conversion, and the legal allegiances of the early propagators of Islam, certain clues are provided by the present distribution of the Islamic legal schools and mystical orders, and by the characteristics of contemporary Muslim practices.

Recent discussions of the dynamics of the conversion of African communities to Christianity or Islam have revolved around certain aspects of the traditional cosmology which are likely to have contributed towards making the societies receptive to monotheistic faiths—given the existence of other additional favourable circumstances. But the paucity of direct evidence for so many of the pre-Islamic communities reduces such discussions, in the Ethiopian case, to, at best, informed guess or informed speculation.

According to Horton, the transition from African traditional religion to Islam and Christianity was as much a consequence of developments which were taking place within the indigenous belief system as it was a result of the impact of external factors. Therefore, acceptance of Islam or Christianity was "highly conditional and selective", and both Islam and Christianity merely accelerated the process of

an already-ongoing process.⁵³ He also argued that traditional African societies responded favourably to Islam or Christianity when either one presented itself with some element likely to bring about a positive response, such as the development of long-distance trade, which was in harmony with a need already felt in the social life of the communities on the receiving end.⁵⁴

This paradigm found its fullest expression in what Horton called the Intellectualist Theory which purports to explain why different groups of people in the West African savanna responded differently to Islam. According to the theory, the rural cultivators, in spite of their long exposure to Islamic influence, largely remained unresponsive, while the rulers showed a pro-Islamic inclination in order to exploit the trade opportunities created by the coming of Islam, but at the same time they remained faithful to their traditional social and ritual system. The professional traders, having nearly abandoned the old cult, lived on the margins of the community and rendered services to the rulers. The allegiance of the pastoralists fluctuated with their own circumstances which tended to vary more widely than those of the sedentaries. The Muslim elite consisting of scholars and saints functioned as auxiliaries to the trading communities.⁵⁵ On the whole the sedentary elements—farmers and rulers—tended to be more attuned to the preservation of traditional religion, whereas the more mobile groups—traders, holy men and pastoralists—were receptive to the universalistic appeals of Islam. This did not necessarily lead to clashes of interest because of the mutually advantageous benefits accruing from the maintenance of the balance between the two apparently antagonistic forces.⁵⁶

On the basis of other types of evidence, Fisher challenged the concept of Islam and Christianity as catalysts for a pre-existing change, and advanced a different interpretation about the phenomenon of

⁵¹ Robin Horton, "African Conversion," *Africa*, xli, 2 (1971), pp. 103–4. See also J.D. Peel, "Syncretism and Religious Change," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, X (1968), p. 122; idem, "Conversion and Tradition . . .", pp. 110ff.

⁵² Robin Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion," Part I, *Africa*, 45, 3 (1975), p. 220.

⁵³ Idem, "On the Rationality of Conversion," Part II, *Africa*, 45, 4 (1975), pp. 374–79. On trading communities in West Africa, especially on their cultural distinctiveness and interaction with the larger society in which they operate, see Abner Cohen, "Cultural strategies in the organization of trading diasporas" in Claude Mellaloux (ed.), *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa* (London, 1971), pp. 267, 275.

⁵⁴ Nehemia Levtzion (ed.), *Conversion to Islam* (New York/London, 1979), p. 2.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

religious conversion. He thus proposed a three-stage model of Islamization. In the first phase, which he called the "quarantine," Islam became the faith of only a minority of foreign traders and clerics. The second phase is characterized by the "mixing" of Islam and pre-Islamic cultural elements. This came about after the conversion of the local people to Islam. His third phase is a period of "reform" which occurred after a long interval and was a reaction against the real or perceived laxity and transgressions of the rulers and the clerics attached to them.⁵⁵ In order to substantiate his view that conversion was not merely a personal or communal transition from one religious system to another, but also carried with it a social stigma, he cited the cases of the pagan Bambara in West Africa and the Oromo in Ethiopia, who openly ridiculed their converted kinsmen.⁵⁶ He also called attention to a form of religious allegiance which he termed "adhesion" that did not involve a complete break with the traditional ritual and which was characteristic of African Islam.⁵⁷ Fisher disapproved of the use of the term "syncretism" because it usually implies deliberate mixing.⁵⁸ Horton in turn criticized Fisher's model of the three-phase process of Islamization on the grounds that the sequence is not applicable everywhere and because the model does not take into consideration the differing responses of the various social groups to Islam. He also took Fisher to task for his apparent reluctance to look more closely into the internal factors for religious change and behaviour.⁵⁹

The question then arises as to whether the models put forward by both Horton and Fisher can be used to explain the process of Islamization in Ethiopia. Such an enquiry would entail some comments on the strengths and shortcomings of the models as general principles of religious change.

Firstly, the validity of Horton's two-tier system of traditional African cosmology in which he perceived potentially conducive conditions for change, while being helpful to the historian for identifying inter-

nal dispositions to change, still remains limited unless the existence of those conditions can be proven. On the other hand his examination of the responses of different social groups to Islam enables us to determine the nature of the factors which influenced their conversion. In the present study reference will be made to traditions about the position of cultivators, traders, pastoralists and chiefs in terms of their responses to Islam in order to see whether Horton's general conclusions are plausible.

Secondly, Fisher's three-stage process of Islamization is also helpful to establish the degree of the consolidation of Islam over a long time-span but, as Horton says, the sequence of the stages could vary in time and place, even within the same society. It may also be added that Fisher's model in which he makes Islam, at the quarantine stage, the faith of *only* foreigners, and views the local converts as carriers of the stigma of mixing, renders the whole process of Islamization too compartmentalized and exclusive of interaction between the various elements in each stage. The characterization of each phase is arbitrary since it is based on a single criterion: degree of conformity to orthodoxy, which is an Islamic ideal rather than a line of demarcation between different stages in the development of Muslim communities.⁶⁰ Besides, is it not conceivable that, even at the first stage, there could be local converts joining the community of foreign Muslims, after having severed their relations with the traditional cult to such an extent that, as Fisher himself noted, they were held in low esteem by their kinsmen? Would their action thus constitute a step towards endangering the "secure" orthodoxy of the foreigners? Has Fisher himself not criticized Horton for having "over-estimated the survival... of original African elements of religion; and... under-estimated the willingness and ability of Africans to make even rigorous Islam and Christianity their own"?⁶¹

In a complex society such as Ethiopia where Islam was introduced under different historical circumstances and from different points along the coast, and because the presence of a Christian culture and state affected the pace of its expansion into the central highlands, it is difficult to apply Fisher's model in its entirety in order to explain the development of Islam in the region. For example, the arrival of

⁵⁵ Humphrey J. Fisher, "Conversion Reconsidered: Some Historical Aspects of Religious Conversion in Black Africa," *Africa*, xiii, 1 (1973), p. 31. For his latest restatement and elucidation of the relevant issues, see *idem*, "The Juggernaut's Apologia: Conversion to Islam in Black Africa," *Africa*, 55, 2 (1985), pp. 153-73.

⁵⁶ *Idem*, "Conversion Reconsidered," p. 32.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁵⁹ Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion," Part II, pp. 395-6.

⁶⁰ On this, see Fisher's own discussion in "The Juggernaut's Apologia . . .," pp. 166-68.

⁶¹ Fisher, "Conversion Reconsidered," p. 27.

the early Muslim refugees, and the coming in subsequent centuries of other emigrants, traders and artisans, could represent the first stage. However, since effective control of the coastal areas by Aksum and its successor states was minimal, Islam was able to penetrate inland much faster than in West Africa, thus claiming the allegiance of the local people. Hence, there was no sufficient time for the quiescent stage of Islamization to last as long as it did in West Africa. In southern Ethiopia, especially in the nineteenth century, Islam was introduced and represented by northern trading communities who also rendered services to their patrons similar to those described by Fisher. However, their Islam might not have been orthodox—in spite of the presence of clerics amongst them—since they themselves were indigenous converts like those to whom Fisher attributes the beginning of mixed Islam. In both central and southern Ethiopia, there were reactions in the nineteenth century to the mixing of Islam and traditional beliefs although these reactions were of local, rather than regional, importance.

Hence the historical circumstances of the introduction of Islam in Ethiopia are complex and offer examples which either conform to, or put into question the validity of, some aspects of Fisher's three-stage model of Islamization, or Horton's own scheme. Only a selective and critical use of some features of both models can provide a satisfactory approach to the problem of conversion to Islam and Christianity since they, in some respects, complement each other, rather than attempting to apply only one of them. As general principles, both are revealing and illuminate several obscure points in indigenous perceptions and traditions of religious conversion.

An excessively direct, and spontaneous connection has often been assumed to exist between commercial expansion and the spread of Islam. Such a view has become so well-established at the popular and scholarly levels that there was, until quite recently, no attempt to question (a) its very historicity and (b)—assuming that it is a valid thesis at least for some areas—its applicability to different historical epochs, circumstances and communities.⁶² It is therefore necessary, both from the theoretical and historical perspectives, to try to deter-

mine, as precisely as the sources at our disposal allow, the actual relationship between traders and the spread of Islam, and to examine how far in each case traders were, if at all, involved in the task of proselytization.⁶³

Trimingham says that "Accounts given by Arab writers make it clear that Islam made its first appearance through the operation of traders."⁶⁴ The mere presence of Muslim Arab merchants *per se* does not, however, lead to conversion or suggest that those merchants were engaged in the work of active preaching. As Trimingham puts it: "... traders were little interested in proselytization . . ."⁶⁵

The commercial interpretation of Islamic expansion suffers from two basic flaws. First, it is largely based on a general assumption that has emerged in order to overcome the lack of detailed factual information—a consequence of the nature of the available sources which do not tell us as much as would be desirable about the social and educational background, and upbringing, of merchants, the ways in which they used their leisure apart from the prescribed religious obligations, and the degree of their religious commitment and competence to undertake the work of Islamic propagation. Nor do they enlighten us on the presence or otherwise of clerics. Second, it tends to obscure the role that the clerics certainly played in the teaching of Islam by ascribing to traders the contributions made by the former. Yet Trimingham himself remarks: "The effective representatives of Islam were traders and clergy, whose functions are often combined in the same person."⁶⁶

Levtzion subscribes to the view that "... traders served as vehicles for the propagation of Islam beyond the boundaries of the military expansion."⁶⁷ He regards the period when "Islam [was] transmitted by Muslim traders" as the second phase in the process of the diffusion of Islam.⁶⁸ In a later work, however, he wrote: "Traders did open

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⁶² Among recent scholars who questioned the natural association between Islam and traders are Cohen, "Cultural strategies . . ." op. cit., pp. 277–78 and Humphrey J. Fisher, "Hassebu: Islamic Healing in Black Africa" in Michael Brett (ed.), *Northern Africa: Islam and Modernization* (London, 1973), pp. 23–24.

⁶³ The case of the Jakhanke of Senegambia is exceptional and well-documented: see Philip D. Curtin, "Pre-colonial trading networks and traders: the Djakhanke" in McElroy (ed.), *The Development of Indigenous Trade*, p. 229; Lamin O. Sanneh, *The Jakhanke: The History of an Islamic Clerical People of the Senegambia* (London, 1979).

⁶⁴ J. Spencer Trimingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa* (London, 1962), p. 25;

idem, *Islam in Ethiopia*, pp. 61, 139.

⁶⁵ Trimingham, *A History of Islam*, p. 28.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 31–32; also pp. 24, 25, 27–29, 190–95; I.M. Lewis (ed.), *Islam in Tropical Africa* (London, 1966), pp. 20, 26.

⁶⁷ Levtzion (ed.), *Conversion to Islam*, p. 15.

⁶⁸ Idem, *Ancient Ghana and Mali* (London, 1973), p. 187.

routes, expose isolated societies to external cultural influences, and maintain communications. But it seems that traders were not themselves engaged in the propagation of Islam.⁶⁹

If and when the sources warrant it, a study of the social background of merchants before their active involvement in commercial activities, might throw light on the role that they played in the whole process of Islamization. In Wallo an examination into the Muslim educational system seems to confirm that there is a special relationship between Islam and commerce.

Those who received basic Qur'anic and advanced instruction had to cope with considerable economic hardship and the necessity of perpetual travelling in search of specialized teachers. This served as a sort of informal training in commerce. Thus Islamic education can be said to have fostered trade which in turn indirectly facilitated the expansion of Islam. This seems to better reflect the nature of the link between trade and Islam: the former contributing to the material sustenance of the latter. Such institutions as the *hajj*, Qur'anic schools and Sufi centres were sustained through the generous patronage of prosperous merchants. This was especially true of the relatively dense settlements along the major trade routes. In the rural areas well-to-do cultivators and craftsmen also contributed to the upkeep of a clerical class through grants of plots of land and regular allowances in grain, particularly during times of harvest.⁷⁰

There is no question that traders had historically played a leading role in creating conducive objective conditions in which proselytization could take root and flourish. It is even difficult to conceive of the spread of Islam in areas where Muslim traders had not preceded the arrival of clerics. However, if this line of argument is pressed too far, it will lead to assertions such as the one made by McCall: "There is little doubt that as long as Muslim merchants have been doing business south of the Sahara, they have also been explaining and exhorting."⁷¹

Wallo oral traditions suggest that teachers were preoccupied with instruction and had therefore little time and the resources to take up trading. In fact there was a local stigma attached to a trading

'ilm because of, among other things, the risk of coming into contact with women in the markets which would invite temptations. Hence, Muslim clerics in Wallo seem to have been, in most cases, professionally, culturally and legally averse to commerce.⁷² Besides, the lives of teachers tended to be relatively more sedentary while trading involved much mobility.⁷³ Moreover, prospective students travelled frequently seeking different instructors.

The early and mediaeval Arabic sources hardly portray a direct link between the activities of traders and the propagation of Islam. In fact there are more references to the establishment of settlements on the Ethiopian Red Sea coast by Arab families from the Hijaz and Yemen, mainly consisting of political refugees and pious men, than to trading stations founded by merchants. There are also more allusions to conversion to Islam induced by clerics than to religious change brought about as a result of the efforts of traders. Such is the tradition, for instance, of the origin of the Muslim dynasty of Shawā and of its successor, that of the Walāsmā of Ifat. Maqrīzī wrote that the ancestors of the latter had hailed from the Hijaz and settled near Zeila. He explicitly stated: "Some of them gained a reputation for their *philanthropy* and *pious* . . ."⁷⁴ Trimingham referred to traditions of Islamization amongst the Somali which are associated with the arrival of Arabs who intermarried with the local ruling families.⁷⁵ Cerulli wrote that the Islamization of southern Ethiopia was effected through the settlement of Arab immigrants comprising both traders and men of religion.⁷⁶

In a perceptive and illuminating article, Sanneh has recently argued that the traditional image of the trader and warrior as the principal propagators of Islam in Africa has been over-emphasized by scholars to the extent of obscuring the equally significant and effective role of the cleric in the dissemination of Muslim culture.⁷⁷ Levzion also expressed a similar view when he noted that while historians have tended to stress the role of merchants as carriers of Islam,

⁶⁹ Idem, *Conversion to Islam*, p. 16. Cf. Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion," Part I, p. 220 and Part II, p. 374.

⁷⁰ In Daniel F. McCall and Norman R. Bennett (eds.), *Aspects of West African Islam* (Boston, 1971), p. 18.

⁷¹ Informant: Shaykh Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn, 7 May 1982.

⁷² Informants: Shaykh Muazzafar, 8 May 1982 and 'Alī. On the incompatibility between trade and clericalism, see Humphrey J. Fisher, "Dreams and Conversion in Black Africa" in Levzion (ed.), *Conversion to Islam*, pp. 229-30.

⁷³ Quoted in Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 59 (emphasis added).

⁷⁴ Cerulli, "Islam Ethiopico," op. cit., p. 115.

⁷⁵ Lamin Sanneh, "The Origins of Clericalism in West African Islam," *JAH*, XVII, 1 (1976), pp. 49, 71.

indigenous traditions of Muslim communities emphasize that of the Muslim holy men.⁷⁸ Fisher has underlined the importance of Muslim teachers in providing not only literacy and education, but also skills in prayer and divination which had utilitarian values.⁷⁹

Let us now turn to the indigenous oral traditions about Islamization. In general, when informants were asked about the agents of Islamization, they invariably first mentioned traders. However, further discussion revealed the significance of clerics. This pattern of response applied to almost all the oral sources consulted.

Precisely those informants who had the highest reputation for historical recollections stated that Arab traders from the Yemen and the Hijāz who settled on the Ethiopian coast were usually accompanied by ‘ulamā², and that it was the latter who played a more decisive role in the propagation of Islam.⁸⁰ A local savant mentioned three mechanisms by which the doctrines of early Islam percolated deep into the Ethiopian hinterland from the coast: trade, conquest and preaching, but placed the emphasis on the last.⁸¹ A third informant came up with an ingenious, yet not implausible, explanation, namely, that men of religion presented themselves to the local communities as merchants, in order to facilitate initial contact and eventual conversion.⁸² The *imām* of one of the mosques in Dessie, Wallo, talking about the conversion of local traders, stated that it was while they were waiting to dispose of their goods on the coast that they came into contact with Islam and Muslim teachers. Upon their return home, they would teach about the new faith amongst members of their immediate family and neighbours.⁸³ A Muslim teacher from Dawway in southeastern Wallo said that the earliest local converts were traders, followed by cultivators.⁸⁴ However, he stressed that there were a variety of mechanisms employed for the propagation

of the faith: through the teaching of the Qur’ān and theology, the holding of the anniversary celebrations of the Prophet’s birthday, pilgrimage to local shrines, and through intermarriage between Muslim Arab immigrants and the local people.⁸⁵ Moreover, he described in very clear terms what the position of traders *vis-à-vis* Islamization was: that they were the patrons, rather than the direct agents, of the dissemination of Islam—by financing the construction of mosques, covering expenses incurred during the pilgrimage to Mecca, purchasing religious texts and allying themselves with the clerical families through marriage. For instance, the big Muslim traders of Gondar and of Darītā to the southeast of it, had a reputation of taking with them on pilgrimage a large number of the ‘ulamā², while the merchants of Dawway were noted for their generosity in acquiring books for the local teachers.⁸⁶ The informant from Dawway also emphasized the presence of cultivators among the early converts, and among those who supported the preservation of Islamic education.⁸⁷

One informant spoke only of preachers without making even a single reference to traders in connection with the initial period of Islamic expansion, although he recognized their contribution to the later consolidation of Islam by procuring teaching and study material for the scholars, and through their generosity towards their maintenance. He also pointed out that the early preachers eventually became members of the local aristocracies.⁸⁸ Only one informant referred to oral traditions that mention that Arab traders assumed (in practice) a role similar to that of preachers. According to him, the traders, in addition to their primary occupation, also worked towards the propagation of Islam. These were traders who had a comparatively higher level of education and who made it a point of honour to follow the Islamic code of behaviour strictly—thus setting a good example of devotion wherever they settled and married with the local people.⁸⁹

Another informant underscored that trade was a noble activity next to farming on the strength of the Prophet’s saying to the same

⁷⁸ Levzion in *Conversion to Islam*, p. 16.

⁷⁹ Humphrey Fisher, “The Eastern Maghrib and the Central Sudan” in Roland Oliver (ed.), *Cambridge History of Africa* (1977), vol. 3, p. 234; also pp. 285, 313, 316, and in his review of *Islam in Tropical Africa* (cited in n. 66 *supra*) published in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XXXI (1968), pp. 437–40, esp. p. 438.

⁸⁰ Informant: *Shaykh Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn*, 29 March 1982.

⁸¹ Informant: *Shaykh Muṣṭafā*, 30 March 1982.

⁸² Informant: *Shaykh Muhammād Nūr*.

⁸³ Informant: *Shaykh Muhammād Jāmmā*, 4 May 1982.

⁸⁴ Informant: *Shaykh Muhammād Zākī*.

⁸⁵ Idem.

⁸⁶ Informants: *Shaykhs Muhammād Tāj al-Dīn* and *Muhammād Zākī*.

⁸⁷ Informant: *Shaykh Muhammād Zākī*. The role of cultivators was also stressed by *Shaykh Muhammād Wālī*, 25 June 1983.

⁸⁸ Informant: *Shaykh ‘Alī*.

⁸⁹ Informant: *al-Hājj Muhammād Thānī Ḥabīb*.

effect and recognized the contribution of Muslim merchants to strengthening the material basis of Islam, but did not see them as playing the role of preachers in any way.⁹⁰

Supporting evidence for the prominent part played by clerics in Islamization also comes from southwestern Ethiopia where Islam, in the first half of the nineteenth century, was first introduced and cultivated among the members of the ruling classes of the Gibē states through the agency of Muslim ‘ulamā’ from Wallo and Gondar,⁹¹ who found in the Gibē states commercial and political conditions favourable to their efforts in religious propagation.⁹² Traders also helped create those conditions.⁹³ It is to be noted that Trimingham also stressed the role of merchants from Shawā, Bagēmder and the Sudan in the Islamization of the Gibē states.⁹⁴ In one of these kingdoms—Limmu-Enārā—it’s mid-nineteenth-century ruler, having lost his power as a traditional ritual-warrior king, converted to Islam under the influence of traders and adventurers.⁹⁵

The history of the conversion to Islam of communities in northern, central and eastern Ethiopia reveals a similar pattern, with factors other than commerce *strictu sensu* playing an important role. In those three regions the role of “missionary” propaganda, and the sixteenth-century impact under Grāñ, seem to have been considerable. The Jabarti traditions of conversion emphasize this strongly.⁹⁶ The case of the ‘Ad Shaykh and Bani ‘Amir tribes is an example of the spread of Islam “through the influence of a holy family.”⁹⁷ So also is that of the Mansā and, to some extent, of the Māryā and the Sāho.⁹⁸ A recent study of the Islamization of the Afār, though largely subscribing to the standard view of a narrowly-defined pre-eminence of traders in the expansion of Islam,⁹⁹ has also taken into

consideration the role of Arab and indigenous Muslim clerics who had received religious training in Arabia.¹⁰⁰

Several writers have stressed the fact that Islam won the so-called pagan populations of Ethiopia because it served them as an ideological weapon with which to combat Christian Amhara territorial encroachment and cultural domination.¹⁰¹ However, there are also many references to the traditions of pagan resistance to Christian influence without requiring the support of Islam.¹⁰²

It was Trimingham who first put Islam in the context of the traditional religion when he wrote: “The gains of Islam were chiefly from paganism . . .”,¹⁰³ and outlined a hypothetical mode of conversion, based on local traditions, of pre-Islamic communities through the arrival of a Muslim saint and subsequent conversion of the local chief and his people induced by the saint’s vision and working of miracles. Islamic culture, being highly adaptive to local conditions, rendered the experience of religious change a relatively smooth process.¹⁰⁴ In Trimingham’s view, because Islam did not disrupt many of the pre-existing social values, and because it offered a wider scope for social mobility and form of worship in tune with the mode of life of the people, it must have been accepted with little opposition.¹⁰⁵ He also commented on the interaction between Islam and the Kushitic “pre-Islamic sediment” through which concepts about the sky gods and spirits might have been assimilated into popular Islam in the form of the veneration of patron saints and the continuation of certain ritual ceremonies with heavy pagan overtones.¹⁰⁶ But these hypotheses, however plausible, do not adequately elucidate

⁹⁰ Informant: *Shaykh* Ḥusayn.

⁹¹ Mohammed, “The Oromo of Ethiopia,” pp. 399, 425, 494, 498; Guluma Gemedia, “The Islamization of the Gibē Region, southwestern Ethiopia from c. 1830s to th early twentieth century,” *JES*, XXVI, 2 (1993), pp. 70, 74.

⁹² Mohammed, op. cit., pp. 399, 425.

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 498, 502.

⁹⁴ Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, pp. 199, 202, 205.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 201. This recalls Horton’s model of the traditional microcosm being undermined and becoming susceptible to external influence.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 152. For more on this, see *infra*, pp. 60–62.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 154–55, 156–57.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 162–63, 168, 177.

⁹⁹ Kassim Shehim, “The Influence of Islam on the ‘Afār” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington at Seattle, 1982), pp. 4, 45, 46, 47, 55.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 59, 78. See also ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Amin, “Al-Sīrāt bayna’l-Quwāt al- Islāmiyya wa’l-Mashriyya fi-l-hiyūbiyya illā nihāyah al-qarn al-tāsi’ ‘ashar,” *Dīnāt Ifriqiyā* (Khartoum), 1 (1985), pp. 48–49.

¹⁰¹ Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 101; Cerulli, “L’Islam en Ethiopie,” p. 319.

¹⁰² Tadesse Tamrat, “A Short Note on the Traditions of Pagan Resistance to the Ethiopian Church (14th and 15th Centuries),” *JES*, X, 1 (1972), pp. 137–50.

¹⁰³ Trimingham, op. cit., pp. 141, 145.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 149–50.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 150.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 252–62. There is no doubt that this phenomenon explains the origins and features of certain forms of religious behaviour which can be observed at various occasional and regular festivals—discussed in some detail in *ibid.*, pp. 262–79—and to which we shall return in a later chapter. For a well-argued critique of the over-emphasis on the carryover of the old beliefs and practices into Islam, see Mervyn Hiscock, *The Development of Islam in West Africa* (London/New York, 1984), pp. 308–9.

those aspects of the traditional belief and social system which favoured the adoption of Islam.

Trimingham speaks of three stages in the process of the assimilation of Islamic culture by pagan communities:

a) an early stage when certain external elements of a Muslim culture were adopted. These included clothing and certain dietary patterns;

b) an intermediate stage when Muslim clerics appealed to, and exploited, the tendency of the local people to believe in the power of supernatural beings. This stage represented the most intimate interaction between Islam and the traditional belief system, and the impact of Islam was reflected in the adoption of Islamic names and participation in Muslim religious festivals; and

c) the last stage in which the belief in the efficacy of the traditional religious sanctions was abandoned and a deep "change in custom and habitual conduct" took place. Certain social institutions and customs such as the levirate and initiation ceremonies were dispensed with. Another feature of this stage was the introduction of Islamic education and the spread of the mystical orders. However, even this period was not marked by a clean break with the past as survivals of the old system were remoulded within the new Islamic values.

While the basic rituals prescribed by orthodox Islam were observed, the veneration of saints assumed an important role in religious devotion and practice, so as to preserve some of the old religious forms while giving them a new content. The persistence of traditional cultural and religious elements, if considered in isolation, might throw doubt on the time depth of the establishment of Islam; but when seen in terms of the overall life of the community, it is but an indication of the process of change.¹⁰⁷

Before discussing the stages in what Trimingham called the "assimilation of Islamic culture . . . in pagan societies" in relation to the expansion of Islam in Ethiopia, let us offer some general remarks on the model's merits and limitations as a tool of sociological analysis. Firstly, the model taken as a whole does not represent the dominant pattern of the historical process of Islamization and does not take into account the complex circumstances and modes of the introduction, expansion and consolidation of Islam in Ethiopia. It is use-

ful only for understanding how followers of traditional beliefs might have perceived, reacted to, and finally adopted, Islam. In other words, it does not say much about how Islam was presented to them. Only in the second and third stages do we find a reference to the role of the agents of Islamization in the whole process. The model seems to have been constructed on the basis of a very mechanical and incidental encounter between pagan communities, on the one hand, and a set of Islamic features—both material and spiritual—on the other.

The dynamic elements in the interaction process—clerics, traders and other categories—are made to play a marginal and passive part. It is as if they, having brought an Islamic cultural complex, consisting of the wearing of turbans and amulets, the adoptions of Islamic names and, at the third stage, education and law, to a fixed point, perhaps on the margins of the pagan homeland, retired to a safe distance in order to observe what the latter would do with Islam.

Secondly, the model is chronologically deficient in that we do not know the duration of each stage in the assimilation process, and there is little to show what factors led to the transition from one phase to the next. Formulated to explain the interaction between Islam and indigenous beliefs in southern Ethiopia in the nineteenth century, it hardly enables us to understand developments elsewhere and before that period—and the history of the encounter between Islam and traditional religions in Ethiopia is as old as the history of Islam in the region.

Thirdly, the discussion of the model is presented without any clear reference to local examples and the evidence to support the characterization of each stage. In fact the traditions of Islamization of nomadic tribes of the plains, to which Trimingham frequently refers elsewhere in his study, and which will be cited below, suggest an entirely different interpretation of the expansion of Islam in Ethiopia. When we turn to the question of whether or not Trimingham's model fits in with the facts about the pattern of the historical development of Islam as preserved in written sources, epigraphic evidence, and present-day oral traditions, we find that it is not only inadequate but also misleading on several grounds.

Firstly, the historical circumstances: considering the geographical proximity of northern and southeastern Ethiopia to the cradle of Islam, the comparatively rapid progress of Islam in those areas of Ethiopia directly exposed to Islamic influence from roughly the seventh century, and the modes of its introduction—through a continuous

¹⁰⁷ Trimingham, op. cit., pp. 271–72 and in his *The Influence of Islam upon Africa* 2nd ed. (London/New York, 1980), p. 43.

movement of traders, preachers and immigrant families—it would be hard to imagine that these vigorous elements representing an emerging and expanding religion could have developed a relationship with the pagan elements of the indigenous population characterized only by a nominal adoption of their life style and some features of their material culture. There was no sufficient time allowed for the nomadic inhabitants and sedentary groups on the edge of the Ethiopian plateau to be selective in their adoption of Islam and Muslim culture. The time span between the first contact and total conversion during which nominal conversion to Islam, or 'conversion of convenience' might have taken place, was narrowed down by the rapid advance of Islam. In addition to this, the tradition of Islamization of the nomads such as the Afar, Saho and Somali, which is linked to the arrival of the Arabs and their intermarriage with the local families,¹⁰⁸ does not support the characteristic suggested in the stages of Trimingham's model. As he himself wrote: "... one individual in fact was sufficient to transform a Hamitic pagan tribe into a new Islamic community."¹⁰⁹ An early reference to the conversion of a whole tribe is that of the Gbbah in eastern Shawā.¹¹⁰ Likewise the Islamization of the Oromo states in southwest Ethiopia, mentioned earlier, was a consequence of the influence of northern Muslim teachers and traders. First the ruling classes, and then their subjects, joined Islam.¹¹¹ There is nothing in the traditions about this change to support the hypothesis of selective adoption and assimilation.

In the coastal areas, Islam was constantly renewed by the influx of foreign and local 'ulamā' and preachers, and their activities seem to have influenced the nature of the encounter between the coastal Muslim communities and the people of the interior. The most significant consequence of this rapid development was that, by the late ninth century, a dynasty claiming descent from a prominent Meccan clan was able to establish itself in northeastern Shawā.¹¹² In the Christian parts of the Ethiopian highlands in the north, inscriptions dated to the eleventh century have been discovered which testify to the early introduction and progress of Islam via the Dahlak islands.

¹⁰⁸ Idem, *Islam in Ethiopia*, pp. 60–61.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 141.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 62; Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 43.

¹¹¹ Trimingham, op. cit., pp. 109–10.

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 58, n. 2, 62.

The question which remains to be asked at this juncture, in the light of what has just been said about the circumstances surrounding the introduction of Islam, is whether the agents of Islamization—preachers, immigrant families and dynasts—would have presented, at that early stage, only the external symbols of Islam to the animist communities of the interior, or whether they would have taught and enforced the whole body of religious and social laws of Islam. Would this not have been more desirable from their own point of view? Was it necessarily impossible to achieve this under the circumstances? There is also another important factor which precluded a three-stage process of Islamic expansion among pagan communities. It must be remembered that there were no organized pagan states in the hinterland facing the Gulf of Aden, which was a principal route for the expansion of Islam, that were capable of checking its progress and regulating the relationship of its inhabitants with the incoming culture. In other words the encounter was between an advancing Islam and non-centralized tribal nomadic communities, and thus there was perhaps less possibility of a long period of co-existence between the two cultures during which the adoption of Islam could progress by slow stages.

Secondly, the characteristics attributed by Trimingham to the stages of his hypothetical model are questionable. To suggest that it was only during the third stage that the observance of Islamic ritual prayers and fasting, and the introduction of Islamic education started, and that during the first two stages, an outward adoption of Islamic cultural features was the only form of assimilation, is too neat a description of a complex process of cultural change, and conflicts with what would seem to be the natural pattern of Islamization, namely, that the teaching of religious dogma and practice precedes the diffusion of Islamic cultural elements. For a Muslim cleric coming into contact with a non-Muslim community, the order of priorities in the propagation of the faith was the reverse of what Trimingham postulated. The cleric would not initially explain to his prospective converts the way he and his fellow Muslims dressed or prepared food and drinks; instead, he would expound in simple terms the doctrines of Islam and the injunctions about the permissible and the forbidden, prayers, fasting and alms-giving. He would then introduce those elements in Islam described in Trimingham's second stage, once he had succeeded in converting the people, in order to retain their

allegiance. Trinmingham himself alludes to the simplicity of Islam and its lack of a "disruptive" effect upon the indigenous people's lives.¹¹³ This is not, however, to minimize the importance of the widespread phenomenon of adopting the external aspects of Islam—often attracted by new Islamic divination, amulets and other sources of protection against supernatural powers—without the inner drive to understand and apply its principles. The point being made here is that this model is useful only for assessing the *response* of sections of the indigenous people to the new faith, not the *way* Islam was first *presented* and *taught* to them.

Therefore, both on historical and theoretical grounds, Trinmingham's hypothesis of a three-stage process of the assimilation of Islam by adherents of traditional beliefs is far from plausible. It is also unsubstantiated and possibly misleading from the perspective of the expansion of Islam in Ethiopia.

Before we offer a broad outline of the pattern of Islamic expansion that takes into account the various elements discussed above, as well as the chronology and the internal position of Islam, let us present a brief comparison of the process of Islamization in Ethiopia with that in West Africa. Three points deserve emphasis at the outset. Firstly, the geographical proximity of the Ethiopian hinterland east of the main escarpment to both the Hijāz and Yemen, and the importance of the sea separating the two coasts as a route of migration of peoples; these were bound to affect the pace of the expansion of Islam. Secondly, since the main thrust of Muslim military and political expansion outside Arabia was directed towards North Africa, the Ethiopian region appeared to be a fertile ground for the peaceful propagation of Islam through various mechanisms: emigration of religious dissidents and the arrival of traders and clerics. Thirdly, one of the most important differences between Islamization in Ethiopia and West Africa was the crucial role which diverse clerical groups such as the Zawaya/Berber, Mande and Torodbe played in the dissemination of Islam in the latter.¹¹⁴

In Ethiopia, through preaching and trading by Muslim Arabs from the Yemen and the Hijāz beginning from the second half of the sev-

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 149.

¹¹⁴ The contribution of these groups to the spread of Islam is discussed in both John Ralph Willis (ed.), *Studies in West African Islamic History*, I, *The Cultivators of Islam* (London, 1979), pp. 1–31 and Hiskett, op. cit., pp. 44–54.

enth century, Islam started to spread inland from the northern coast (Dahla) and the southern point (Zila). The immediate consequences of these activities were the founding of commercial settlements and the conversion of the local people in increasing numbers. Gradually, but faster in tempo than in West Africa, where the process of Islamization was making slow progress from the eighth century and gathered momentum only from the tenth and eleventh centuries, Islam in Ethiopia began to penetrate inland. By the late ninth century, there had come into existence viable and well-organized Muslim communities in eastern Shawā. The founding of the Makhzūmī dynasty of Shawā, which Lewis considers to be the earliest centralized Islamic state in sub-Saharan Africa,¹¹⁵ was a result of this rapid progress. The period from the twelfth to the fourteenth century was one of further expansion mainly in the areas south and west of the Awāsh basin leading to the emergence of a series of Muslim principalities such as Ifāt, Dawārō, Bali and Hadya. Islam and trade played a crucial role in the development of these political entities. On the other hand, in West Africa, Islam was introduced into already-existing and well-established states such as Takrur, Ghana, Mali and Songhay as an additional ideology for the ruling dynasties.

The sixteenth century saw the rise of Grāñ and the successful launching of his campaigns into much of north and central Ethiopia. As discussed earlier, this helped to invigorate the pre-existing Muslim communities and led to conversions through coercive means. In West Africa, the Moroccan conquest of the Songhay Empire in the late sixteenth century might have speeded up the process of the diffusion of Islam by breaking Songhay's monopoly of trade and diverting it to other directions.¹¹⁶ The intellectual contribution of the Moroccans to Islam was minimal although they strengthened Ottoman cultural influence.¹¹⁷

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Ethiopia witnessed the revival and further advance of Islam through the activities of mystics and the patronage of both chiefs and traders, especially in the first half of the nineteenth century. In some areas of Wallo there were attempts to introduce reforms in certain practices and tendencies within local Islam, and some militant clerics undertook the *jihād*

¹¹⁵ Lewis (ed.), *Islam in Tropical Africa*, p. 38.

¹¹⁶ Hiskett, op. cit., pp. 153–54, 155.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 155.

as an instrument of renewal. However, these movements were locally-oriented and their leaders lacked a wider vision and the resources for mobilizing their communities politically and socially, in contrast to the Muslim reformers of West Africa. For Islam in central Ethiopia, the second half of the nineteenth century was also a period of reverses because the revived Christian monarchy attempted to bring about religious uniformity through a policy of coercion and persecution of the indigenous Muslim communities.

The progress of Islam in Ethiopia, briefly discussed above, can be summarized in the following chronological and thematic scheme:

1. Early phase (from ca. the 7th to the 11th century) characterized by the arrival of Muslim immigrants—traders, preachers and other professional groups—as individuals and families, not as whole tribes. This is attested by inscriptions found in the Dahlak islands dating from the middle of the ninth century; fragments of Arabic chronicles which testify to the establishment of a local Muslim dynasty in eastern Shawā in the late ninth century; and inscriptions from southern Tigray—one of which has been dated to 1006 A.D.
- The results of this early penetration of Islam were: a) the establishment of Islamic bridgeheads along the coast; b) the conversion of the coastal populations and the nomadic and sedentary groups of the plains; c) the supplanting of the Byzantine traders by Ethiopian Muslims,¹¹⁸ which suggests that there was a considerable rate of local conversion to Islam; and d) the emergence of Islam as a political factor in the Horn of Africa from the tenth century.
2. Period of expansion and consolidation (12th to 15th century). A number of Muslim statelets were established in the Ethiopian hinterland, mainly in the areas south of the Awāsh basin. This period saw the earliest outbreak of conflicts with the mediæval Christian kingdom over the control of trade and access to the coast. This coincided with, or was triggered off by, a demographic factor—movements of nomadic/sedentary populations from southeastern Ethiopia—and the expansion of both the reconstituted Christian kingdom and the Muslim states.
3. Period of confrontation (the 16th-century Grāñ episode). This was not simply a clash between Islam and Christianity but the climax of the centuries-old expansion of sedentary and nomadic pop-

ulations. It eventually resulted in the collapse of Muslim power in the highlands and the decline of Islam as a political factor in the region. The Oromo expansion also temporarily arrested the progress of Islam.

4. Period of steady expansion (17th and 18th centuries). Islam made remarkable progress in the north/central plateau while the Christian state was faced with internal problems, mainly the decline of the central authority of the monarchy. Islam regained political ascendancy under regional dynasties, particularly in Yajju, Warra Himano and other parts of Wallœ.

5. Period of revival and internal reverses (the 19th century). The first half of the century saw the coming and expansion of the mystical orders both in central and southern Ethiopia. The second half was a time of crisis resulting from the attempt of the revived Christian monarchy to check the progress of Islam and undermine it as a political and cultural factor in north/central Ethiopia.

Early Traditions of Islamization of Wallo

Traditions about the pre-Islamic social and religious life of the Wallo Muslim communities collected during the fieldwork hardly help us in the reconstruction of the history of the region before the advent of Islam. The few references informants made to that early period tend to be rather vague and biased by the inclination of Muslim literati to dismiss pre-Islamic history and culture as unworthy of collection and narration. They often overlooked the fact that a fuller understanding of the local characteristics of present-day Islam, especially among peasant communities, might be obtained only if the social and economic history of these communities could be reconstructed on the basis of direct and indirect evidence. Some informants described the pre-Islamic communities in very stereotyped terms: as pagan (*wathani*: Arabic for idolater, heathen) and worshipers of idols (*tāghīt*), rocks, trees and animals.¹¹⁹ The *imām* of a mosque in Addis Ababa, realizing the difficulty inherent in trying to describe the religious tradition of such a remote period, emphasized that it would not be possible to determine how long these practices had

¹¹⁸ Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 43.

¹¹⁹ Informants: *Saykhs* Muhammad Ṭāj al-Dīn and Muhammad Walé; *al-Hājj* Muhammad Thānī.

prevailed before they were abandoned when Islam began to have its full impact on the indigenous communities.¹²⁰

Local informants also admitted that there is no way of ascertaining the exact period and mechanism of the earliest introduction of Islam into Wallo, although it is generally believed that it had been well-established in its eastern flank long before the wars of Ahmad Grān in the first half of the sixteenth century.¹²¹

According to one of several traditions of Islamization recounted by informants, Islam was brought to Wallo by the *'ulamā'* of Ifāt in northeastern Shawā.¹²² Hence, an early period when Islam first began to penetrate the region, along its southeastern frontier with Muslim Shawā, was when Ifāt emerged as a major Muslim principality, i.e., about the twelfth/thirteenth centuries.¹²³ It is, however, also quite possible that Islam might have been brought to the eastern fringes of Wallo even earlier: when the "Sultanate of Shawā" is believed to have flourished, i.e., from the end of the ninth to the twelfth century.

Another, and even older, pre-Grān tradition of Islamization is that of the *Jabarti*.¹²⁴ Originally, the term "Jabart" referred to a place near Zeila,¹²⁵ where the early Muslim preachers and traders first settled. Gradually, it came to be used not only as the name given to the new settler communities, but also as a generic name for all indigenous Ethiopian converts to Islam, and especially for the Muslim communities in northern and central Ethiopia. In subsequent centuries, the descendants of the original *Jabarti* community began to move inland into Ifāt, Wallo and Tegrāy.¹²⁶

There is a variant of this tradition which makes one Ismā'īl b. Ibrāhīm, a Yemenite¹²⁷ or Hījāzī¹²⁸ mystic, the ancestor of some of the *Jabarti* groups. Accordingly, his offspring are said to have spread from Ifāt to Wallo and Tegrāy. During the civil wars of early Islam in the late seventh century, some of the *Ashrāf* of Mecca, including those claiming descent from Ismā'īl, are said to have fled to Egypt from where they moved to the Sudan and the Ethiopian region in order to propagate Islam.¹²⁹

According to some informants, the word "*Jabarti*" is derived from the Arabic root *jabarā* (to set broken bones) and related the following anecdote to explain its etymology. Ismā'īl's father once travelled from Yemen, his homeland, to Mecca in order to perform the pilgrimage. While there, he married a woman who had been divorced three times. She conceived a child and her former husband, who had not taken another wife, was so infuriated that he had the arm of the child's father cut off and had him expelled. Not long afterwards, the child was born and grew up to become a young and inquisitive boy who was apparently offended by the nickname given to him by the local people: *ibn al-maqīū* "son of the one-armed man." After the death of his stepfather, his real father came to see him. The boy asked him about the circumstances which had caused the loss of his arm. Then, the severed arm was searched for, dug up and miraculously set, whereupon his father joyfully exclaimed: "*jabarānī*: 'he set my broken arm.'¹³⁰ Another informant linked the *Jabarti* tradition with a statement he claims that the Prophet had made while

¹²⁰ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Walē. See also Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 271.

¹²¹ Informants: *Shaykhs* Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn, 'Alī Yūsuf and Muhammad Walē; Zergaw, "Some Aspects," p. 2.

¹²² Informants: *Shaykhs* Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn and Muzaaffar.

¹²³ Idem.

¹²⁴ Trimingham, op. cit., p. 30.

¹²⁵ Idem.

¹²⁶ Maqrīzī wrote that "Jabarta" was formerly called "Jabraħ"; G.W.B. Huntingford (trans.), *Maqrīzī: The Book of the True Knowledge of the History of the Moslem Kings in Abyssinia* (London, 1950), pp. 7, 12 (ypescript, SOAS Library). Some of my informants wrongly located Jabart either near Zabid, Yemen: *Shaykh* Muzaaffar, or close to Djibouti: idem and *Shaykh* Muhammad Nūr. This may reflect the general difficulty of identifying place-names along the coast. Others like *Shaykh* Muhammad Jammā considered Jabart as part of, or a synonym for, Ifāt itself, or even as a name given to the earliest community of Muslims in the hinterland of Zeila. This talies with the early Arabic sources and the identification proposed by later scholars.

¹²⁷ Trimingham, op. cit., p. 150. See also article on "Djabart" in *EI*, new ed. (1965), II, p. 355 and Wansbrough, "Africa and the Arab Geographers," pp. 96–97.

¹²⁸ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Walē.

¹²⁹ Informants: *Shaykhs* Muhammad Walē and Muhammad Zākī, and *al-Hāfi* Muhammad Thānī. See also B.G. Martin, "Arab Migrations to East Africa in Medieval Times," *IJAHIS*, VII, 3 (1975), p. 375; idem, "Mahdism, Muslim Clerics . . . , p. 95, where he is described as a Sūfi from Zabid who died in 1420/21.

¹³⁰ Informants: *Shaykhs* Abd al-Salām and Muzaaffar.

instructing his followers to seek asylum in Aksum: “*yħunūni*”: “come to my assistance.”¹³¹

Some of the *Jaharti* groups claim that their conversion dates from the time of the Muslim refugees who came to Aksum during the first *hijra*, while others trace it to the days of the early Muslim sultnates in southeast Ethiopia, and still others to the time of Ahmad Grāñ.¹³²

In the view of one informant, it appears that small groups of the supporters of ‘Alī and Mu‘awiyā arrived in the Ethiopian hinterland facing Zeila, and that even after their settlement, the rivalry between the two factions resurfaced from time to time. It is said that they settled in separate areas and consciously avoided each other.¹³³ The Argobba of Ifāt and Qāllu, for instance, claim descent from one group of Mu‘awiyā’s sympathizers.¹³⁴ It is claimed that the strong and well-articulated sense of devotion shown by Ethiopian Muslims to ‘Alī and his family, whom they regard as divinely-favoured, and their zealous veneration of the Prophet’s descendants, can be traced to the presence of Shi‘ite elements among those who settled in Ethiopia.¹³⁵ However, present-day traditions are unanimous on the fact that the influence of the early dissidents of Islam such as the Khārijites and the Shi‘ites did not spread to the Ethiopian region, a fact which partly explains the loyalty of indigenous Muslims to mainstream orthodox Islam,¹³⁶ and the absence of sectarian and locally-inspired movements.

Informants have also recounted other traditions of Islamization of Wallo. Although chronologically even less precise than those discussed above, these traditions are suggestive of an alternative source of Islamic influence: the north. These traditions are about the Asqāri and ‘Ad Kabirē according to which the ‘Ad Kabirē clan in Tambēn, Tegrāy, claims to have originated from the H̄ijāz and to have been related to the Asqāri. Its clerics later moved into Wallo and dis-

seminated Islam. The ancestors of the clan were two brothers, the eldest of whom was called Kabirē (from the Arabic *kabir*) while the youngest was Asqāri (from the Arabic *asqar*). The offspring of Asqāri settled in Boranā, western Wallo, where they were considered as possessors of *karāma* (Divine Favour).¹³⁷

The multiplicity of the traditions about the Islamization of Wallo preserved by local Muslim scholars are partly substantiated by documentary sources and reflect the diversity and direction of the sources of Islamic influence over the indigenous communities of Wallo. The significance of these local traditions lies in the fact that they throw some light on the indigenous perceptions on the complex pattern of Islamization and give prominence to the largely peaceful character of the mode of conversion of the people, and to the role which immigrant families and clerics played in the diffusion of Islam and Muslim culture. A critical assessment and recognition of the potential value of these and other traditions of Islamization for the reconstruction of the early history of Islam, its expansion and interaction with the local cultures, is indispensable for a reevaluation of the role of Islam in Ethiopia at both the national and regional levels.

Distribution of Islam

A. *Sunnī Islam*

Orthodox Islam as a broad religious concept with its emphasis on a sense of solidarity amongst diverse Muslim groups and on a spirit of belonging to a universal religious community (*ummā*) is confined mainly to scholars well-versed in the classical Islamic sciences, and to the modern élites trained at higher Islamic institutions in the Middle East. As a basis of the belief and practices of ordinary Muslims, and as a general principle governing their daily behaviour through the medium of the Shari‘a, the divine law, Sunnī Islam is widespread throughout those areas of Ethiopia where numerically significant Muslim communities had been well-established, whether in towns or in the countryside.¹³⁸

¹³¹ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Zākī.
¹³² *H.* loc. cit. Tringhām, op. cit., pp. 30, 151–52.

¹³³ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Zākī. For a tradition of conflict between those claiming Umayyad ancestry and those tracing their descent from the Makhzūmī clan through Khalid b. al-Ward, see Cerulli, “Il Sultanato dello Scioa nel secolo XII secondo un nuovo documento storico,” in *L’Islam di ieri e di oggi*, p. 218.

¹³⁴ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Zākī.

¹³⁵ Informants: *Shaykhs* Muhammad Zākī and ‘Abd al-Salām. Asa J. Davis, “The Sixteenth Century Jihad in Ethiopia and the Impact on its Culture,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, III, 1 (1964), p. 118.

¹³⁶ Davis, op. cit., pp. 118–120.

¹³⁷ Informants: *Shaykhs* Muhammad Nūr and ‘Alī. See also Emeric Johannes van Donzel, *A female Embassy to Ethiopia 1647–1649* (Aethiopistische Forschungen 21) (Stuttgart, 1986), pp. 58, 135.

¹³⁸ Cf. Tringhām, op. cit., p. 227, who sees organized Islamic life centring around mosques only in the towns.

It is true that, as Trimingham and Markakis have pointed out, there seems to have been little interaction between the various Muslim communities of Ethiopia, owing to geographical and cultural barriers which inhibited closer contacts, and consequently, each tended to be introspective and much concerned with its own activities and local aspirations.¹³⁹ However, both writers have overlooked one other important, and perhaps even crucial, factor which had kept them apart: the general attitude and specific policies which the Christian monarchy, nobility and clergy adopted towards indigenous Muslims to which reference has been made elsewhere.¹⁴⁰ Under such circumstances, therefore, there was no opportunity or possibility to nurture and develop a corporate sense of belonging to a national Islamic community transcending ethnic and regional loyalties and interests. However, there has been much interaction at the level of personal contacts between members of the various groups and even a stronger link through trade, the observance of communal and religious festivals such as the annual anniversary celebrations of the Prophet's birthday, visits to local shrines and the pilgrimage to the Hijāz, and through the diffusion of Islamic education offered at well-known Sūfī and teaching centres in eastern Wallo and Harar, into areas as far apart as Gondar and southern Shawā, and the Gibē regions of southwest Ethiopia.

Trimingham's assessment of contemporary Muslim religious life in Ethiopia in which he distinguished between three layers: orthodoxy, esoteric Islam and a symbiosis between Islam and the pre-Islamic sediment, deserves some critical evaluation. He wrote that the impact of orthodoxy on the people had been weak and that, conversely, the influence of the pre-Islamic culture had been pervasive.¹⁴¹ He also made the assertion that, apart from Harar, there had been no Islamic educational centre despite the region's proximity to the Islamic heartland, ascribing this to the absence of a permanent Muslim state.¹⁴² As the present study will demonstrate, this can hardly be substantiated. Both in the rural areas, amongst predominantly peasant communities, and in and near the towns, there were important centres

of Islamic education and Sūfī teaching, especially in Wallo, whose influence was quite extensive and whose activities gave an impetus to the revival of Islam in the region in the nineteenth century.

One of the most striking and perhaps unique features of Islam in Ethiopia is the existence of three¹⁴³ of the four canonical schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*madhāhib*; sing.: *madhab*) and several of the major mystical orders (*turuq*; sing.: *turuqah*). Their peaceful coexistence and lack of political aspirations can be accounted for by the fact that the introduction and expansion of any one of them was not associated with a particular regional or local ruling dynasty. It is also a further testimony to the peaceful mode of the diffusion of Islam in the country.

The different schools of Islamic law were introduced at various times and from several Muslim regions mainly through the agency of indigenous Muslim scholars who had received their formal religious training in *Fiqh* (Islamic law) in the Hijāz and the Yemen. However, owing to the paucity of written sources on the precise period and background of their introduction, it is difficult to present a coherent chronological account about their regional distribution. We have therefore to rely on oral traditions about the last two hundred years in order to identify the sources from where they were originally brought, and the mechanisms by which they were spread.¹⁴⁴

The earliest period proposed by an informant for the introduction of the dominant *madhab*, the Shāfiyya (founded by Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī, 767-820), is the sixth century A.H./twelfth century A.D., and is associated with the ancestors of the Argobba of Ifat.¹⁴⁵ The Muslims of Ifat, Harar, Bālē and Arsi, and most of those of Wallo, are predominantly followers of this school, as are the Afar and the Oromo of southwest Ethiopia. The school's dominant position is a consequence of its being the first to be introduced into the country.

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 226-27; Markakis, *Ethiopia*, p. 69.

¹⁴⁰ Husseini, "The Historiography of Islam," pp. 19-21.

¹⁴¹ Trimingham, op. cit., p. 226.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 225 and Mordechai Abir, "Trade and Christian-Muslim Relations in Post-Medieval Ethiopia" in Robert L. Hess (ed.), *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies, Session B, April 13-16, 1978* (Chicago, 1979), p. 412.

¹⁴³ Not two: Levzion (ed.), *Conversion to Islam*, p. 5. Norman J. Singer, "Islamic law and the development of the Ethiopian legal system," *Howard Law Journal*, 17, 1 (1971), p. 146, referred to a view expressed by some members of the Sharī'a court in Addis Ababa in the sixties about the existence in Ethiopia of all four schools of jurisprudence. This was perhaps an attempt on their part to explain the comprehensiveness of the law, and the jurisdiction which the court apparently had to investigate cases brought to it by followers of any one of the four schools, rather than as evidence for the presence of the Hanbali rite.

¹⁴⁴ Informant: Shig'ħi Muhammad Ta'ej al-Din.

¹⁴⁵ Informant: Shig'ħi Muhammad Zaki.

The second strongest rite is the Ḥanafīyya founded by the theologian of Kūfa, Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu'mān b. Thābit (699–767), known locally by his epithet: *Imām al-Āzam*.¹⁴⁶ It has many adherents in Wallo and amongst the Muslims on the coast, the Sāho, those in Bagēmder and Gojjām, and some in Jimmā and Harar.¹⁴⁷ The *madhhab* with the smallest number of followers is the Mālikiyā founded by the Medinese jurist, Mālik b. Anas (d. 795). Its influence is mainly concentrated in northwestern Eritrea and those areas bordering on the western frontier with the Sudan.

According to Wallo informants, the Ḥanbalī rite, founded by Abīmad b. Ḥanbal (780–855), is not represented in the country. Although there is no recorded tradition about attempts made by its followers to introduce it into Ethiopia, its theological stance on strict application of Islamic law and uncompromising insistence on doctrinal and ritual conformity to it would have made its acceptance very difficult, if not impossible.¹⁴⁸ There were, however, isolated and exceptional cases of individual Ḥanbalīs. Informants mentioned a small number of followers of the rite who lived in Qāllu in the time of the celebrated scholar/saint, *al-Hāfiẓ* Bushrā (d. 1863).¹⁴⁹

It is worth noting that the later success of the Ḥanafī school is to be attributed partly to its tradition of moderation and its tendency to avoid extremist views relating to the literalist interpretation and application of the revealed law.¹⁵⁰ This must have considerably enhanced its initial position and enabled it to flourish in a religious environment which was generally receptive to new ideas coming from

¹⁴⁶ Informants: *Shaykhs* Muḥammad Jāmmā and Muḥammad Zākī.
¹⁴⁷ However, the first informant cited above was obviously in error when he said that the Ḥanafī school had the largest number of adherents, and that it was the oldest to be introduced. His view seems to have been influenced by its later and rapid expansion. According to Maqrizī, the mediaeval Muslim states such as Ifat, Dawārō, Arababnī, Sharkha, Bālī and Dara all followed the Ḥanafī rite, although in Ifat, in the chronicler's time, the Shāfi'īyya prevailed; Huntingford (trans.), *The Book of the True Knowledge* ... , pp. 8–11. At present Ifat is predominantly Shāfi'ī. Informant: Amīr Abīmad Yūsuf, Shawā Robin, 19 September 1983. See also Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umari's account (mid-14th century) about the prevalence of the Ḥanafīyya in all but one (Ifat) of the contemporary Muslim principalities, cited in Tringham, op. cit., p. 73.

¹⁴⁸ Informant: *Shaykhi* Muḥammad Tāj al-Dīn; Yūsuf Abīmad, *al-Mālik fī'l-Habasha* (Cairo, 1935), p. 62.

¹⁴⁹ Informants: *Shaykhs* Muḥammad Nūr and 'Abd al-Salām. I, p. 123.

¹⁵⁰ See article on "Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu'mān" in *EI* new ed. (Leiden/London, 1960),

a diversity of areas. While the Shāfi'ī and Ḥanafī rites were introduced from the Hijāz and the Yemen, the Mālikī was brought from the eastern Sudan. According to one informant, the Ḥanafī was also brought from Shām (Syria) to Tigray in northern Ethiopia and via Yajū to the rest of Wallo, and from Zabid in the Yemen to Dawway in southeastern Wallo.¹⁵¹

In Muslim Wallo the Shāfi'īyya prevails in the lowlands while the Ḥanafī is dominant in the highland areas, although one finds a small number of followers of either rite in the two zones.¹⁵² An informant related that in Awsā, eastern Wallo, the Ḥanafī school is strong. It was introduced by a certain Kabīr Ḥanza whose ancestors originally came from Harar. He was a contemporary of *al-Hāfiẓ* Bushrā.¹⁵³ Other Ḥanafī areas include Qāllu, Boranā, Warra Himano, Warra Bābbo and Yajū.¹⁵⁴ In Dawway the man who is locally remembered as the propagator of the Shāfi'īyya was *Muṣṭafā* Dāwūd ibn Abī Bakr (d. A.H. 1234/1818/19 A.D.).¹⁵⁵ It is related that in A.H. 1206/1791 A.D.,¹⁵⁶ he travelled to Zabid and, having received his training as a jurist according to the Shāfi'ī school, he returned to Dawway where he established a well-known teaching centre at a place called Gaddo. He thus contributed to the spread and consolidation of the rite in the region. In Ifat, a place called Qorārē is believed to have been one of the earliest centres of diffusion of the Shāfi'īyya. A certain Ismā'īl Ahmad is credited with its expansion in the area.¹⁵⁷ Another, even older centre, was Māfid near the present-day town of Dabra Sīnā, about 120 miles north of Addis Ababa, where a local scholar, who is believed to have lived before the time of Grān, had brought the *madhhab* from Egypt.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵¹ Informant: *Shaykhi* Muḥammad Walē.

¹⁵² Idem.

¹⁵³ Informant: *Shaykhi* Muḥammad Sirāj, Bāti, 18 July 1983.

¹⁵⁴ Informants: *Shaykhs* Muḥammad Tāj, al-Dīn, Husayn and others. Informants: *Shaykhs* 'Alī, Muṣṭafā, Muḥammad Nūr, and *al-Hāfiẓ* Muḥammad al-Tayyib, Addis Ababa, 3 August 1983.

¹⁵⁵ The date given in an unpublished Arabic fragment on local history for his arrival from Zabid is A.H. 1198/1783 A.D. (I am grateful to *Shaykhi* Muṣṭafā for allowing me to consult the manuscript).

¹⁵⁶ Informant: *Shaykhi* Muḥammad Jāmmā.

¹⁵⁷ Informant: *Shaykhi* 'Abd al-Salām.

B. *The Gamut of Religious Brotherhoods*

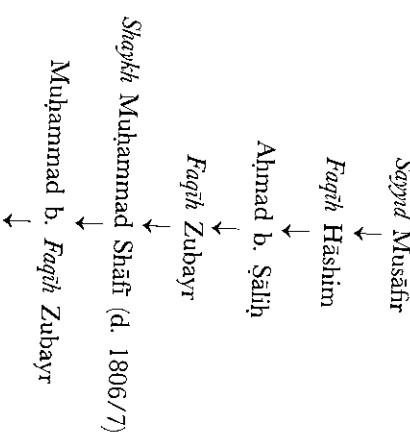
Commentators on Islam in Ethiopia, both early and later in the twentieth century, asserted that the mystical orders practically did not exist in the country.¹⁵⁹ This is, of course, far from the truth. On the other hand, Trimingham dates their presence only from the sixteenth century because al-Umarī in the fourteenth century made no reference to the existence of Sūfī establishments such as *madrasa*, *rībat* or *zāwiyya*.¹⁶⁰ He also goes on to say that apart from the Qādiriya, the other orders were introduced only in the nineteenth century.¹⁶¹

The discussion which follows will show that the standard view not only on the chronology but also on the number of orders which are believed to exist in the country, and on the mechanisms by which they were propagated,¹⁶² needs revision in the light of the available oral traditions.

Within Ethiopia proper, Trimingham recognized only the following orders: the Qādiriya, Ahmadiyya, Mīrghāniyya (Khatmiyya), Tijāniyya, Sammāniyya and Shādhiliyya.¹⁶³ Informants also mentioned other lesser orders.

Oral evidence on the original centres where, and by whom, the various orders were founded agrees with the known facts about these aspects of the early history of the orders. However, it also throws light on how they were disseminated, especially in Wallo, although informants are vague about the chronology.¹⁶⁴

The first order to be introduced into Ethiopia, and the one which presently has the largest number of adherents, is the Qādiriya whose founding is attributed to the Hanbali jurist, ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (1077–1166). As Trimingham noted, it was first brought to Harar by Abū Bakr b. ‘Abdallāh al-‘Aydarūs (d. 1503) in the sixteenth century.¹⁶⁵ Present-day traditions in Wallo in particular confirm that it was from Harar that it was brought to the region in the nineteenth

*The Qādiri Silsila in Wallo*¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁹ Guérinot, "L'Islam et l'Abyssinie," p. 30 and S.W. Zwemer, "Islam in Ethiopia and Eritrea," *The Muslim World*, 26, 1 (1936), p. 14.

¹⁶⁰ Trimingham, op. cit., p. 234.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. For instance, Trimingham, op. cit., p. 239, thinks that the Qādiriya was introduced "through commercial and maritime relations".

¹⁶² Ibid., pp. 234–36; informants: *Shaykh* Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn and others.

¹⁶³ Only *d-Hāfi* Muhammad Thānī suggested a tentative date for the propagation of the Qādiriya in Wallo: the late 18th century.

¹⁶⁴ Trimingham, op. cit., pp. 234, 240.

century, although, in view of the earlier discussion on the Islamization of eastern Wallo, one cannot exclude the possibility that it might have been disseminated much earlier than that.¹⁶⁶ However, the mystical chain of genealogy (*silsila*) of the Qādiri order, orally preserved and cited by the Muslim scholars of Wallo, mentions a certain *Faqīh* Hāshim of Harar¹⁶⁷ as the source from whom the *wird* (initiation litany) was passed on to the local *‘ulama’*, in whom the indigenous line of descent culminated.¹⁶⁸ *Faqīh* Hāshim himself was initiated into the *tariqa* by a certain *Sayyid* Muṣāfir of Yemen.¹⁶⁹ *Ab-Hāfi* Muhammad Wale’s account provides further details: *Faqīh* Hāshim received the *wird* from *Sayyid* Muṣāfir, described as having hailed from the "West", and from an unknown *‘ālim* in Medina.¹⁷⁰ The Qādiriya was introduced amongst the Muslims of Rāyyā, northeastern Wallo, in 1872 by the renowned scholar, *Shaykh* Jamāl al-Dīn Muhammad of Annā (d. 1882).¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ Informant: *Shaykh* ‘Abd al-Salām.
¹⁶⁷ His father was *Sharif* ‘Abd al-‘Azīz of Gondar: informants: *Shaykhs* ‘Abd al-*fajūl*'s father was a Qādiri himself, the order might have been passed on directly from him.

¹⁶⁸ Informants: *Shaykhs* Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn and others.

¹⁶⁹ Informant: *Shaykh* ‘Abd al-Salām.

¹⁷⁰ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Wale.

¹⁷¹ Trimingham, op. cit., p. 241.

¹⁷² Source: various informants. *Shaykh* Muhammad Wale’s unpublished work (for full bibliographical reference, see next chapter, n. 29) provides a longer genealogy up to the time of the Prophet.

Wallo its expansion was the work of *Shaykhs* Habib and Bashir. The latter also spread it to Boranā, Warra Himano and Warra Babbō.¹⁷⁸

The Almadīyya, founded by Ahmad b. Idrīs (1760–1837), is strong only in Massawa.¹⁷⁹ The Khalwati order, which has only a small number of followers, used to exist in Eritrea and Wallo.¹⁸⁰ The Naqshbandiyya, associated with Muhammad Bahā' al-Dīn al-Naqshbandī (d. 1389),¹⁸¹ had an insignificant number of adherents. *Shaykh* 'Alī of Gondar (*f.* mid-nineteenth century) is believed to have been a Naqshbandī.¹⁸² The order had also flourished for a short while in Yaju.¹⁸³

Sayyid Ibrāhīm (d. 1956)

In Wallo the spread of the Shādhiliyya order, deriving from Abū Madyan Shu'ayb (d. 1197) but attributed to Abū'l-Hasan 'Alī al-Shādhili (1196–1258),¹⁸⁴ is associated with an 'ālim from Warra Himano named Ibrāhīm Nagāsh (d. A.H. 1368/1948), whose centre was at a place called Kalo near Recqē. The order spread into Boranā and Bagēnder largely through his efforts.¹⁸⁵ The Sammāniyya was introduced by *Amīr* Husayn, the grandson of the Sudanese mystic, *Shaykh* Ahmad al-Tayyib b. al-Basir (d. 1823) who had been initiated by Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Sammāni of Medina (1718–75). *Amīr* Husayn passed on the *wird* to the well-known scholar of Shonkē in southeast Wallo, *Shaykh* Jawhar b. Haydar.¹⁸⁶ The order was later introduced to Jimmā. In Eritrea its introduction is associated with *Shaykh* Ādam al-Kināni, a Maghribī scholar buried near Abbi 'Addi in Sarāyē.¹⁸⁷

Conclusion

The Mirghaniyya (Khamniyya), founded by Muhammad 'Uthmān al-Mirghānī (1793–1853), is widespread along the Eritrean-Sudanese frontier and the adjacent areas, as well as in Massawa, Asmara, Karan and Aqordat. The Tijāniyya, founded by Abū'l-Abbās Ahmad b. Muhammad b. al-Mukhtār al-Tijānī (1737–1815), is strong in Wallagga, Jimmā, Gojjām and Gondar. According to one informant, it has in recent times taken the second place formerly held by the Shādhiliyya especially because of its appeal to the merchant class: it is believed that anyone initiated into the *tariqa* would become wealthy.¹⁸⁸ In

The main argument advanced in the chapter can be summed up thus: While traders did bring some elements of Islamic material culture and commodities from the Arab world, and probably also combined their commercial activities with some preaching, it was the 'ulamā', at first of foreign origin, but gradually and increasingly from amongst the local converts, who expounded the doctrines and practices of Islam, and who planted and cultivated it on indigenous soil. Therefore, it was the *zāwiyā* or rural Islamic centres of education, and later on, with the expansion of the Sūfi orders, the various centres of local pilgrimage, rather than the trading stations and markets, which recruited converts to Islam, and laid the basis for the emergence of viable and prosperous Muslim communities in the countryside and towns of the Ethiopian interior.

The next chapter will focus on the origins of the Sūfi tradition of Islam in Wallo, the contribution of the mystical orders to the resurgence of Islam in the first half of the nineteenth century, and the

¹⁷³ J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford, 1971), p. 14.

¹⁷⁴ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn. Abū Ahmad al-Ithvūbī (pseud.), *al-Kām al-Tājī fi'l-Habasha* [1960?], p. 55, refers to a certain *Shaykh* Umar Ādam al-Shādhili who lived in the time of Tewodros.

¹⁷⁵ Trimingham, op. cit., p. 247. According to *Shaykh* Muhammad Zākī, *Mujīb Dāwūd* and Abba Asiya of Dawwāy were also Sammāni. The order was also propagated by *al-Hāfi* Bushra; see *infa*, pp. 107–108.

¹⁷⁶ Trimingham, op. cit., p. 236.

¹⁷⁷ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Walī. See also Shuaib Uhman Balogun, "The Works of 'Abdu'l-Qadr b. Gidado in the context of Nigerian History" (unpublished

Ph.D. thesis, Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham, 1983), p. 21: "It [the Tijāni order] appealed to many people [in Sokoto] because it promised both good fortunes in this world and salvation in the next". See Jamil M. Abu-

Nasr, *The Tijāniyya: A Sufi Order in the Modern World* (London, 1965), p. 47.

¹⁷⁸ Informants: *Shaykhs* Muhammad Jāmmā and Muhammad Nur.

C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 1990), pp. 147–48, 179–80.

¹⁷⁹ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Walī.

¹⁸⁰ Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders*, p. 14.

¹⁸¹ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn.

¹⁸² Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn.

¹⁸³ Informant: *Shaykh* 'Abd al-Salām.

emergence of reformist currents within the indigenous Muslim communities of the region. It will also treat the development of centres of Islamic teaching and of local pilgrimage. It is worth noting that all these aspects were the consequences of the growth and consolidation of Islam whose complex processes of introduction and dissemination, as well as historical development, we reviewed in the present chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

SUFISM AND THE REVIVAL OF ISLAM IN WALLO
(ca. 1800–1850)

Our principal concern in this chapter is to seek the roots of the dynamic upsurge of reformist Islam that found expression in the expansion and consolidation of the mystical orders, and in the establishment of centres of Islamic education and local pilgrimage in Wallo during the first half of the nineteenth century. These developments will be treated through an examination of the careers of some of the most outstanding religious scholars and reformers, and of the centres of teaching which they established.¹

Two external factors must be taken into account at the outset. First, the general reawakening of Islam in the Muslim world beginning from the late eighteenth century,² which was partly a response to the decline of the Ottoman Empire and partly a reaction to the apparent stagnation of established Islam. The period witnessed the development of vigorous fundamentalist movements such as the Wahhābiyya, the emergence of new mystical orders, and the revival of old ones. The second factor was the growing commercial and strategic importance of the Red Sea littoral as a point of access to markets and sources of both essential and exotic commodities. The volume of trade increased and so did the movement of peoples and ideas generated by the pilgrimage to the holy places of Islam. It is interesting to note that Ethiopian Islam did not respond to the Wahhābi call for the rejection of established Islamic institutions and practices such as the mystical orders and the veneration of saints, but nevertheless adopted for its own purposes the reformist and revivalist zeal of the Wahhābi movement. In other words, of the three main nineteenth-century forms of Islamic militant movement in the Muslim world (Wahhābism, Mahdism and *Tarīqa* revival),³ it

¹ Cf. Trimingham's sweeping generalization: 'Negro Africa' offered "... virtually no response to the mystical Way, either intellectually or emotionally, [while only] adopting form without content and spirit' in his *The Sufi Orders*, p. 219.

² Idem, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 234; *The Sufi Orders*, p. 105.

³ *The Sufi Orders*, p. 245.

was only to the last that the Ethiopian Muslim *'ulama'*, especially those of Wallo, responded favourably. In so doing they reinvigorated the existing religious culture, and established and developed institutions which still play a significant social and spiritual role in the local communities today.

As Trimingham observed, the two most important initiators of nineteenth-century reform movements—Ahmad al-Tijāni and Ahmad b. Idrīs—both believed that the mystical ideal was best achieved by union with the spirit of the Prophet Muhammad through the recitation of *dikr*, and both were extremely hostile to asceticism.⁴ These traits also became integral and characteristic features of Islam in Ethiopia: the veneration of the person and traditions of the Prophet and his family, and the marked absence of any tradition of asceticism.

Among the internal factors, the most important was the disintegration of the Christian kingdom in north/central Ethiopia which opened space for intense rivalry and wars of attrition among major dynastic and provincial protagonists. It enabled local chiefdoms in Wallo to evolve into provincial power bases the rulers of which acted as champions and patrons of Islam. The new opportunities thus created were skilfully used by resourceful and aspiring scholars—and traders—not necessarily for reviving the political power of Islam in the region but rather to accelerate the material and cultural development of the Muslim communities whatever the political context. The local *'ulama'*, acting on their own initiative, worked towards the reform of existing religious practices, which they perceived as being incompatible with Islamic orthodoxy, and towards the further expansion of Islam, sometimes in alliance with local and regional potentates,⁵ and with the peasant and merchant communities that were mobilized for the achievement of those ideals.

The period between 1800 and 1850 marks the third phase in the history of the progress of Islam in Ethiopia. The earliest phase had extended from at least the tenth to the twelfth century when, as will be recalled, the activities of initially Arab, but later increasingly indigenous, clerics and traders brought Islam to the Ethiopian hinterland. As a consequence of the rising power of the Fātimids in Egypt, and the growing importance of the Red Sea as a commercial route, Islam began to emerge as a politically significant factor in the

entire region.⁶ Another result of these new developments was the emergence of several Muslim principalities which were economically sustained by commerce. The second phase began in the second half of the fifteenth century with the rise to prominence of the sultanate of Adāl and culminated in Grāñ's campaigns of conquest in the first half of the sixteenth century. This phase marked the apogee of Muslim political power in the region.⁷ Then followed almost three centuries of slow growth in the number of Muslims in Ethiopia, but the period also witnessed a general decline in Muslim scholarship owing to such factors as the upheavals created by the Oromo migration and settlement, and the political instability and social dislocation of the warlord era. The nineteenth-century revival of Islam may therefore be viewed as a broad reaction to that cultural lethargy.

The pre-nineteenth-century history of Sufism in Wallo, like that of some other aspects of the history of Islam in the region and the country as a whole, is shrouded in obscurity. No coherent and chronologically reliable account can be reconstructed on the basis of the oral traditions and written sources which are relevant only to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They invariably devote themselves not to any discussion of the theological and mystical dimensions of Sufism, but to a description of the lives and activities of famous Sūfī teachers and reformers. However, if the sources are placed in the context of the history of the dissemination of Islam in the region and of the periodic hostilities between the mediæval Christian state and the Muslim sultanates, they will allow the historian to detect the emergence of mystical and revivalist tendencies amongst the local *'ulama'* in periods of internal stress and upheavals within the Muslim communities, and also in times of active hostile measures taken against them by the Christian secular and religious authorities. Indeed the Sūfī revival of the period under review can be regarded both as a reaction to the complacency and rigidity of institutionalized Islam (and a genuine attempt to bridge the wide chasm separating popular from Sunnī Islam), and a manifestation of a broad intellectual resurgence. If we are to trace the origins of the influence of the mystical orders, it is to those factors within the Muslim communities themselves that we must turn. However, before bringing out those aspects of the revival which owed their impetus

⁴ Ibid., pp. 106-7.

⁵ *Islam in Ethiopia*, pp. 111-12.

⁶ Tadesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea . . .," pp. 81ff.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 164ff.

to internal developments, let us first consider the broader external influences that affected the pace and character of the movement.

The rise to prominence of Egypt under Muhammad 'Ali in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and the reconstitution of Ottoman power in the Hijāz and the Red Sea littoral at about the same time, gave new stability and security to a region that had been lacking them since the accelerated decline of the Ottoman Empire in the preceding century. This in turn stimulated a significant increase in the volume of trade and in the number of pilgrims visiting Mecca and Medina.⁸ These new developments affected the Ethiopian region since they activated the demand for Ethiopian products.⁹ Another important consequence was the opening of a trade route from Tājura to the kingdom of Shawā,¹⁰ a significant branch of which also went to southeastern Wallo and beyond through Awsā, Dawway and the Qāllu markets.¹¹

Two specific aspects in the broad development outlined above require further elucidation. One was the new impetus to pilgrimage undertaken by indigenous Muslims. This was made possible by the emergence of the port of Tājura and the opening of the inland trade route. The proximity of Tājura to eastern Wallo, it being nearer than either Massawa in the north or Zeila in the south, enabled pilgrims to save both time and resources. The new route became the preferred pilgrim route and the local 'ulamā were in a position to maintain much closer links with the Arabian centres of Islamic learning and pilgrimage,¹² in order to acquire texts on the traditional disciplines of Muslim scholarship and on contemporary intellectual trends and political events, and above all, to travel in order to receive advanced training and acquire new ideas about the reviving mystical orders and Sunnī Islam.

⁸ Mordchai Abir, "Trade and Politics in the Ethiopian Region 1830-1855" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, SOAS, University of London, 1964), pp. 8-10.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 13, 180ff.; Richard Pankhurst, *History of Ethiopian Towns from the Middle Ages to the early nineteenth century* (Äthiopistische Forschungen 8) (Wiesbaden, 1982), pp. 305, 309-13.

¹¹ Abir, "Trade and Politics . . ." pp. 222-24. For a brief discussion of Islam in Tājura, see op. cit., pp. 191-93.

¹² On the impetus which pilgrimage to the Hijāz gave to the "... desire to reform or revive Islam in North Africa," see R.G. Jenkins, "The Evolution of Religious Brotherhoods in North and Northwest Africa 1523-1900" in Willis (ed.), *Studies in West African Islam*, pp. 51-52.

The second aspect, closely related to the first, also had to deal with the opening of the trade route from Tājura to Awsā and eastern Wallo, which increased the commercial importance of those areas as transit zones for goods originating in the interior. This commercial revival brought prosperity to many trading families and communities who were now able to support an increasingly articulate clerical class for whom they procured theological and instructional texts, and whose pilgrimages they often financed.

Local chiefs benefited from the newly-increased revenue to build up their power bases not only at the provincial but also at the national level. In many cases this enabled them to give further support to the mercantile and especially the clerical classes, and thus to take an active part in the revival of regional Islam.

The internal developments throw light on the way Sufi ideas were introduced and cultivated, the nature of the response of the local 'ulamā to these ideas, and the form in which they expressed it. They also reflect the special relationship which existed between trade and Islam discussed earlier, showing that the rise of the Muslim trading community was indeed important for the consolidation of Islam but mainly insofar as Muslim traders created and partly maintained the material infrastructure that supported the efforts and activities of the religious scholars. Traders played that role through generous and regular allowances in the form of provisions and shelter, through covering the expenses incurred on the purchase of reading and teaching texts, and through financing pilgrimages, rather than in the conventional and vague sense that "The caravans served as a vehicle by which the principles of Islam and Muslim 'ulamā from Arabia reached the remotest corners in the highlands".¹³

In the last chapter reference was made to the introduction and distribution of the mystical orders in Ethiopia in general and in Wallo in particular. The available oral and written evidence from in the region did not pass through all the various stages often postulated in the modern scholarly literature on the subject, namely, "natural asceticism", mysticism, scholarly Sufism and the "expansion of the spiritual influence of eminent Sūfis", which are believed to have led to the emergence of the *tariqa*.¹⁴ Rather, it seems to have

¹³ Abir, "Trade and Politics . . ." p. 19.

¹⁴ Jenkins, "The Evolution of Religious Brotherhoods . . ." op. cit., p. 43; Tringham, *The Sufi Orders*, pp. 2-30.

bypassed the first three phases and begun to take root and flourish in Ethiopia as a whole beginning from the "fourth" stage. This was partly because the orders themselves were belatedly disseminated into the country and partly because of the special historical circumstances of their introduction.

The orders were brought to Wallo in the second half of the eighteenth century and began to spread widely in the beginning of the nineteenth century through the agency of the pilgrimage made by indigenous scholars or through visits to other centres of Sufi activity such as the Sudan where some received their initiation and the authorization to propagate the orders. With the possible exception of the Qādiriyya, which was first introduced to Harar by a foreign cleric, Abu Bakr b. 'Abdallāh al-'Aydarūs (d. 1503),¹⁵ and later (in the eighteenth century) by *Sayyid* Musāfir (of Yemeni or Maghribi origin), the other orders were spread in Wallo in particular by indigenous clerics. It seems that while the founders of the orders in the Hijāz sent out their disciples to the Sudan and North Africa to carry out the work of propagation, they showed little, if any, interest in doing so as far as Ethiopia was concerned despite its geographical proximity. Therefore, both the urge and the initiative to acquire training in the mystical way, and the will to disseminate it locally, remained with the indigenous Muslim scholars.

This is very crucial in two respects: first, it reflects the collective historical vitality of the local *'ulama'* and second, it helps explain the success and the peaceful coexistence of the many orders represented in the region, given their dissemination by local scholars who were familiar with the prevailing local customs and traditions, and were thus in a position to explore and create favourable conditions in which the orders could flourish. This prevented strong opposition from both the established religious notables and the political authorities. It also explains the absence of intense rivalry and clashes, if not occasional friction, among the propagators and followers of each school of mystical tradition.¹⁶

¹⁵ Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, pp. 234, 240.

¹⁶ According to oral sources, there have been only two distinct periods of tension among the followers of the various orders. The earliest friction occurred when the orders began to spread from Qāllu and other parts of highland Wallo into the eastern and southeastern lowlands, especially in Dawaway and Ifāt. Several informants noted that these areas had traditionally been bastions of Sunni Islam and therefore hostile to the growing influence of the orders: *Shaykh* Muhammad Zaki

Another significant characteristic of the orders is the fact that they were not affiliated to local or regional political or dynastic groups and that they did not aspire to wielding political power through the *tariqa* leaders.¹⁷ That is why their existence and growing influence were not felt as a direct threat to the existing local and regional power structures. Nevertheless, from time to time, difficulties arose between some of the more traditional religious authorities and chiefs, on the one hand, and the Sufi leaders, on the other, especially when the latter questioned the religious commitment of the former, and attacked, and sought to abolish, certain religious norms. It is also worth emphasizing that there are no traditions of the brotherhoods being directly or indirectly involved in local trading activities which might have encouraged competition and tension. Rather the limited degree of their prosperity was based on three sources: contributions and gifts collected, by the acknowledged heads of the orders, from the lay affiliates and pilgrims on special occasions such as the celebration of the Prophet's birthday; regular allowances in grain advanced by the well-to-do cultivators and material presents from traders; and the produce of *waqf*-lands¹⁸ worked by their students and voluntary members of the surrounding community.

In what ways did the mystical orders give a new impetus to the further dissemination and revival of Islam in Wallo? First, the Sufi centres contributed a great deal to the development of literacy and scholarship as they were not only retreats for spiritual insights and reflection, and the venues for religious gatherings, but were also educational establishments. This role was further enhanced by the very background of the first propagators of the orders since initiation into

and others. The second period of conflict was during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and was the consequence of the introduction and expansion of the Tijaniyya. Its extremist and exclusivist stance on the question of the legitimacy of the other orders as mystical paths to individual and collective salvation, and especially its insistence on the obligation of renouncing allegiance to another order as a precondition for membership and initiation, gave rise to stiff opposition from the established orders: informants: *Shaykh* Muhammad Wale and others. The conflicts were sometimes bitter and led to the composition of polemical works by supporters of the rival orders. For West Africa, see John Hunwick, "Towards a History of the Islamic Intellectual Tradition in West Africa down to the Nineteenth Century," *Journal for Islamic Studies*, vol. 17 (1997), pp. 13-14.

¹⁷ Cerulli, "Islam in East Africa," op. cit., p. 219.

¹⁸ On this, see my "Waqf and in Nineteenth-Century Wallo (Ethiopia)" (a paper read at the Twentieth Annual Spring Symposium on 'State, Land, and Society in the History of Sudanic Africa,' University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 22-24 April 1993) (proceedings forthcoming).

a particular order was in all cases preceded by a thorough grounding in the classical Islamic subjects. This precluded the danger of these centres degenerating into mere centres of rituals and popular festivals. To the life of piety and sanctity, and the power to transmit *baraka*, attributed to the Sufi scholars, was therefore added their reputation as reformers and defenders of orthodoxy through offering standard Islamic education. Only in the time of succeeding generations did the scholarly dimension of local Sufism begin to be overshadowed, and eventually eclipsed, by the popular features with which it later came to be identified. Local centres of pilgrimage proliferated and the reformist and scholarly features of the "mother centres" started to give way to the ritualistic, thaumaturgic and para-liturgical aspects of saint veneration. This was the consequence of, among other factors, the resurgence of elements of traditional belief and practice that began to undermine the orthodox and revivalist foundation established by the first generation of scholar-saints.

Second, informants have emphasized the significant contribution which the local heads of the orders made towards strengthening the position of Islam by introducing and sustaining a new spiritual dimension to religious insight and experience: the ritual of reciting and studying *dhikr*, both individually and collectively, as a way to salvation.¹⁹ They also set a high standard of Islamic morality and devotion in their behaviour and, above all, imparted a sense of fraternity, identity and solidarity to members of the scholarly and lay communities through regularly-held religious gatherings (sing.: *hadra*). Thus they preserved a collective spirit of belonging to a wider community cutting across occupational, ethnic and regional particularisms.

The Sufi teachers also expounded and commented upon the precepts of Islam in simple terms to the mass of believers by introducing them to the exemplary lives and traditions of the Prophet and his Companions. Anecdotes about his deeds and the heroes of early Islam were narrated at such collective and pious gatherings organized by the Sufi heads in order to fill the hearts and minds of the people with a strong sense of devotion and commitment to Islam. This was of crucial importance as such a method of propagating the religion represented an effective means by which its basic tenets could be impressed upon the ordinary folk much more dramatically and permanently than by simple exhortation and the teaching of dogma,

as had been the practice of the traditional *'ulama'*. The part played by the Sufi orders in the dissemination of Islam was eloquently described metaphorically by a contemporary well-known *'âlim* of Ethiopia: "Had it not been for these men [the Sufi teachers], Islam in Ethiopia would not have been able to stand on its own feet."²⁰

Another scholar, after comparing the roles of three different agents of Islamization—the cleric, jihâdist and the Sufi *shaykh*—arrived at a similar conclusion, confirming the view expressed by the previous informant. He said that the traditional scholar had no strong appeal for ordinary men because of his narrow intellectual pursuits and the social distance he maintained between himself and the commoner. Moreover, his activities did not extend beyond a small circle of young pupils and advanced students. As for the jihâdist, because he employed coercion and threats in promoting the expansion of Islam, his chances of success were very limited and no thorough Islamization could be achieved by such means. By contrast the Sufi teacher relied more on his reputation as a source and transmitter of *baraka* and a successor of *karâma*. He taught the *dhikr* and other esoteric rituals in such a way as to win the hearts and souls of the faithful. Therefore, his impact was more durable and visible, and was sustained and revived through regular ritual and spiritual exercises which the initiates were obliged to perform and which they in turn passed on to others in their own localities.

The same informant, describing the contents of Sufi teaching, observed that whereas the jurists and other professional men concentrated only on individual mastery of all branches of knowledge, the *tariqa* teachers, while recognizing the importance of academic excellence, also emphasized the obligation of carrying out one's religious duties as laid down in the Qur'an and the Sunna. They argued that instead of studying exotic and prestigious subjects, a Muslim must recite the *dhikr*, read the Qur'an and perform the intercessory prayers. A believer must subject his entire body and mind to the rigours of intense reflection and meditation in order to demonstrate his submission to the will of God. They also instilled in the minds of the affiliates a profound sense of brotherhood and communal life

¹⁹ Idem. Also in his unpublished work, *Râm al-'Aqâid bi Hajjat 'Uzâma'* and *Ullâma' wa 'Ahlâq wa Salâm al-Islâm wa 'l-Afâqâ* (Information for the Ignorant through the Lives of the Great Men of Ethiopia from among the Scholars, Saints and Rulers of Islam and Sincere Friends), p. 2. (I wish to express my thanks to the author for his ——————

informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Tâj al-Dîn.

style. The *murid* was supposed to be completely obedient to his *shaykh* and to observe strictly the times and patterns of the rituals.

One of the factors for the success of the mystical orders was the tact and skill with which their local propagators were able to introduce and establish them, and their recognition of the deep roots and persistence of traditional values and customs. This can be illustrated by the following two anecdotes narrated by our informant.

It is related that a certain *shaykh at-tarīqa* once travelled to an Oromo-speaking village where he found the local Muslims drinking wine and committing adultery and other sins. When he disclosed to them the nature and purpose of his mission, they rebuffed him. So he publicly announced his intention to prepare a feast in honour of the Prophet's birthday anniversary, and asked them to make contributions towards the expenses. They responded favourably and brought cows, sheep and goats to be slaughtered. In the evening, when the litanies and other panegyrical songs began to be recited to the beating of drums, both the local men and women started to fall into trances and to dance in frenzy as if they were participating in a ritual of exorcism. When the ceremony was over, the *shaykh* proceeded to explain the tenets of Islam and to demonstrate the incompatibility between their reprehensible practices (wine-drinking and adultery) and the injunctions of the Qur'an. Their initial attitude of hostility finally gave way to understanding and consent to confirm to the teachings of Islam.²¹

In a similar anecdote, when *Mu'īz Dāwūd*, having received his training in Zabīd, returned to Dawway in about 1783, he discovered, much to his disgust, that some of the local Muslims were still following certain traditional practices such as the drinking of the fresh blood of slaughtered animals and worshipping under trees. He therefore made legal pronouncements condemning these deviations, but nobody heeded him. He then asked each family to send their children to him to receive religious training. After some time the children completed their studies and were sent back by their master to their respective villages. There they came into conflict with their own parents and neighbours over the issue of the place of the local customs in Islam. They were gradually able to prevail upon their parents and the elders to abandon the old practices and to conform to Sunni Islam.²²

Major Sūfī Shrines in South Wallo

In the Muslim parts of present-day Wallo as a whole, there have existed numerous and well-known Sūfī establishments, dating from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which fulfilled several functions: as seats of higher Islamic learning, centres for the training and initiation of individuals into the mystical orders, and shrines and sites of local pilgrimage where the annual celebrations of the Prophet's birthday have been, and still are, held. Thus they came to acquire over the last two hundred years a special status as the focus of organized collective religious experience and social interaction. They are geographically spread out over a wide area extending from northeastern Wallo down to the southeastern frontier with Shawā, as well as in central and western Wallo. In this section our discussion will concentrate on the growth and expansion of only the most important establishments which flourished in the nineteenth century, and on their significance for the dissemination of both the orders and Islamic education.²³

A. *The Shrine at Jamā Negus*

Located on the crest of a mountainous range in Albukko, Qāllu, and about half a day's of arduous walk westwards from the roadside village of Harbu, fifteen miles south of Kombolchā, the centre was founded by the militant scholar, *Shaykh Muhammad Shāfi b. Ayyāri Muhammad*,²⁴ in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. He played a crucial role in the dissemination of the Qādiriyah order as he formed the second vital link in the mystical chain of transmission of the order, having been initiated by *Faqīh Zubayr* of Yajju. He in turn initiated his master's son and taught many others about the Sūfī way. All informants were agreed that it was during his time, and possibly on his initiative, that the annual festival commemorating the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid al-nabi*) started to be celebrated on a large-scale for the first time in the Wallo region.

The centre which he established at Jamā Negus also served as a base from where he launched periodic armed campaigns to the surrounding countryside and beyond in order to bring about both

²¹ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Wale.

²² Idem.

²³ For more, see Hussein Ahmed, "Two Muslim Shrines in South Wallo," *Proceedings of the Fifth Seminar of the Department of History* (Addis Ababa, 1990), pp. 61-74.

²⁴ On his life and achievements, and how the place got its name, see pp. 95-101 below.

religious conformity among the Muslims and the conversion of isolated Christian communities. He thus combined, as did many others, the mystical, scholarly and militant features of Islam. As one informant put it: "He was a *dākir*, a teacher, a *mujahid*, and a *shaykh al-tarīqa*."²⁵

His death in 1806/7 marked an important stage in the transformation of the centre from a major Sufi teaching institution into a shrine which still attracts several thousands of pilgrims annually from the surrounding areas and further afield, especially during the Islamic month of *Ramādhan*. *Shaykh* Muhammad Shāfi's reputation as a saint was so well-established that people from all walks of life converge at his shrine to celebrate the Prophet's birthday and offer their votive sacrifices within the premises of his sanctuary. The following discussion of the ceremony and rituals, and of the social background of the pilgrims and the purpose of their visitation (*ziyāra*), is based on a field observation carried out in December 1982, and is in many respects typical of other similar shrines throughout Muslim Wallo.

Prospective pilgrims from the nearby localities arrived a few days before the main event and set up their temporary shelters or huts in the open space surrounding the permanent structures which consist of a mosque, the room where the remains of the saint were laid to rest, and the residence of the shrine's keeper. The shrine proper is separated from the other buildings by a wooden fence and the grounds of the enclosure around it are regarded as ritually clean and sacred.

The first important ritual performed by the pilgrims was to prostrate themselves in front of the saint's tomb and kiss the walls of the main building. This act represented one of the most intimate and emotionally-charged moments of the entire event during which people made supplications to the saint for his intercession and *baraka*. Those suffering from mental derangement and the "possessed", as well as the most emotionally-involved devotees, cried out and fell

into a trance, and had to be helped up to their feet by the shrine's attendants and their own companions. This extraordinary and bizarre behaviour was interpreted as a visible manifestation of a process of exorcism whereby the malevolent spirit which had possessed the individual was being expelled by the invisible power of the saint,

and the trance was regarded as a physical form of the struggle of the evil spirit to be released.

Following this, a visit was made to the house of the designated representative and custodian of the shrine. People handed in their gifts (*hadjya*; local variant: *hadjya*) in cash or kind after kissing his outstretched right hand, this being seen as a physical medium for the transmission of the saint's blessings and an expression of the pilgrim's humility. On the eve of the festival, a large number of sheep, goats and bulls brought by the visitors were slaughtered and the meat distributed among themselves and the congregation.

What was the socio-economic background of the pilgrims? Most of those coming from the countryside were cultivators, weavers and others engaged in sundry crafts. The most conspicuous group were the itinerant rural students, popularly and often pejoratively known as *mājūlī* (from the Arabic root *nashīl*: to go) so called because of their extensive and seasonal travels, usually in groups. The pilgrims coming from the towns, both near and far, had diverse occupations and social status. They included the urban *'ulamā'*, merchants and Muslims (and a small but growing minority of Christians) employed in both public and private sectors: lower- and medium-grade civil servants, teachers and students. The women were mostly housewives, students and the urban unemployed. A fringe group consisting of the physically handicapped and beggars also came to perform the pilgrimage but primarily to partake of the instant superabundance of food, and to collect charity. A makeshift stall was also put up by individual retailers from the surrounding countryside, and mainly from the nearby towns, to cater to the daily needs of the mushrooming pilgrimage community that had sprung up overnight. They sold, often at understandably inflated prices, a wide selection of items ranging from the ceremonially indispensable ones like *chāt*,²⁶ coffee, sugar, soft drinks, firewood, incense, perfumes and candles to everyday necessities such as the traditionally-baked bread.

In the afternoon and throughout the night of the main festival, people formed small circles consisting of members of the same family or neighbourhood and acquaintances, around which they drew a cloth partition, and began the celebration in earnest. The ceremony was dominated by the conspicuous consumption of *chāt* and the

²⁵ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Jammā.

²⁶ On this, see below n. 85.

recitation of litanies in Amharic or Arabic, or often in *'Ajami'*²⁷ in honour of the Prophet and the local saint and his family. As the day progressed, people assumed an ecstatic and enraptured mood and became completely absorbed in the act of utter devotion which gradually built up into a climax of physical and spiritual frenzy. These small circles of devotees were formed around the main shrine and represented an impressive act of collective worship. There was a great deal of hustle and bustle and the infinity of time and space seemed to focus on the unfolding of the ceremony. People were continuously on the move either to fetch things from their neighbours or to take part in ritual activities which were attended to the fullest capacity. The sound of the chanting, and the occasional outbursts of the overzealous, reverberated in the surrounding hills and valleys, while the fragrance of burning incense and other aromatics, and the odour of perfumes, lent the whole atmosphere a special aura and intensity. It was indeed a powerful ritual act.

People who came for the first time made vows to return with some modest or expensive item if their wishes were fulfilled with the assistance of the saint's intercessory power. The women prayed and sought his help in order to have children or to recover from some illness with which they, or other members of their families, were afflicted. Men generally sought aid to achieve success in their respective occupations—trading or farming—and to obtain recovery from ill-health.

Early in the evening and throughout the night, the whole place began to take on a new character: it slowly changed from a centre where sober and pious people came to pay their respects to the saint and to renew their devotion to the Prophet into a venue of a series of collective rituals the nature and purpose of which appeared to an

outside observer difficult to grasp fully and to reconcile with the ideas and life style of the saint himself, and with the tenets of orthodox Islam. This concerns the ritual dancing and other related ceremonies of the *zār* (spirit-possession) cult²⁸ performed largely, but not exclusively, by the womenfolk. Certain categories of women (and men) believe that they are "possessed" by some, often malicious, spirit (*jinn*) which they have to keep appeasing in order to ward off any misfortune which might befall them. When they come to such gatherings and participate in collective chanting and dancing, it is believed that their sense of being "possessed" is reactivated and the latent desire to release their pent-up emotions is stimulated by the singing and dancing. They would thus begin to throw themselves into a frenzy by shouting and uttering esoteric words and phrases until, with the steady slackening in the emotional state of those around them, they started to cool down and eventually lose consciousness as a result of sheer physical exhaustion. This is one of the well-established and traditional forms of exorcism practised by both Muslims and Christians. What was so striking about it was that it was being reenacted at a centre of local Muslim pilgrimage. Parallel to, and side by side with, the celebration of the Prophet's birthday, which was a religious festival sanctioned by Sunnī Islamic traditions.

These manifestations of traditional ritual and belief go to show that, in spite of the long establishment and consolidation of Islam in the region, and notwithstanding the attempts made in the first half of the nineteenth century by various *'ulamā'* to extirpate the old cultural accretions and to reform Islam, some elements of the pre-Islamic belief have continued to exert influence over the ordinary people until the present day. They thus reflect the coexistence of formal Islamic institutions and some features of the old belief and ritual system.

During the festival we have been describing, the '*'ulamā'* from the surrounding areas were engaged in the recitation of litanies and panegyrical verses about the Prophet either orally or from local manuscripts and published texts, and in relating anecdotes from the lives of the Prophet and the local saints, and from those of their contemporaries.

²⁷ See Alula Pankhurst, "Indigenising Islam in Wallo: *Ajami* Amharic verse written in Arabic script" in Bahru Zewde, Richard Pankhurst and Tadese Beyene (eds.), *Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Addis Ababa, 1994), II, pp. 257-73; Seggē Negātū, "Oral Traditions on the Miracles of *Sayyid Sayyid Bushrā* and the Celebration of the *Mawlid* Festival at Gata (Wallo)" [in Amharic] (B.A. thesis, Department of Ethiopian Languages and Literature, Addis Ababa University, 1990); Minako Ishihara, "Textual Analysis of a Poetic Verse in a Muslim Oromo Society in Jimma Area, Southwestern Ethiopia" in Shun Saco and Eisei Kurimoto (eds.), *Northeast African Studies*, Senni Ethnological Studies 43 (1996), pp. 207-32; and Hussein, "Two Muslim Shrines in South Wallo," pp. 68-69. For a recent study on Harar, see Camilla C.T. Gibb, "Baraka Without Borders: Integrating Communities in the City of Saints," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XXIX, 1 ((1999), pp. 88-108.

²⁸ On the *zār* cult, see, among others, Richard Natvig, "Oromos, Slaves and the Zar Spirits: A Contribution to the History of the Zar Cult," *JAHs*, XX (1987), pp. 669-89; Lidwien Kapteijns and Jay Spaulding, "Women and the Zar and Middle-Class Sensibilities in Colonial Aden, 1923-1932," *Sudanic Africa*, 5 (1994), pp. 7-38.

The scholars were gathered in the main mosque or in makeshift tents together with their young disciples and other peripatetic students, and most of the townsmen. The whole ceremony was preceded and inaugurated by the chanting of what is called *rāmā*, a collection of panegyrical poems in praise of the Prophet often recited at the beginning of such communal religious gatherings. The litanies were composed by *Shaykh* Ahmad b. Ādām of Dānā, northeast of Wādiyā in Yajū. He was originally a native of Bataho near Jamā Negus and died in A.H. 1321/1903 A.D.²⁹

After the *rāmā*, there followed the recitation of several didactic poems (*manzūmāt*; sing.: *manzūma*) composed in Arabic and Amharic, and of panegyrics (*madi*), which extol and glorify the virtues of the Prophet and the local saints. The chanting was led by a recognized panegyrist (*mādi*). The recitation was not merely an oral reading from an existing text or a simple recollection of memorized lines, but followed a set of musical intonations and a pattern of vocal manipulation which had been either devised by the author of the text or improvised by later composers. The harmony between bodily movement and the chanting of the praise-songs is very impressive and seems to have been designed to induce and attain the highest stage of spiritual elation and excitement.

The more orthodox amongst the scholars who had gathered at the shrine were undoubtedly aware of, and uncomfortable about, the apparently popularized character of the festival. However, because the occasion provided social interaction and engendered a sense of communal identity and cohesion among the diverse participants of the rituals, they were reluctant to pronounce an outright condemnation of the excesses committed, due to the fear of popular reaction. Under normal circumstances, they would not have tolerated them at all.

An informant mentioned three aspects of local saint veneration which are deviations from the Sunna. These are the kissing of stones

²⁹ He is also popularly known as Dāniyy al-Awwal (the first [*shaykh*] of Dānā). He was initiated into the Qādiriya order by Jamāl al-Dīn Muhammad of Annā. See *Shaykh Muhammad Walé b. al-Hājj Ahmad b. ‘Umar, Kitāb al-Tirāz al-Manqūsh fi Māqābat Auḍiyā’ al-Huhūṣi* (Book of Variegated Embroidery on the Virtues of the Saints of Ethiopia), unpublished MS, pp. 30-34. (I am indebted to the author for allowing me to consult the text.) Trinimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 241, is clearly in error in regarding Dāniyy al-Awwal's successor as having received the Qadiriyya word from Jamāl al-Dīn.

and circumambulation of shrines by women, their mixing with men during ritual dancing, and the ceremony of exorcism, all of which are observed at many places in Wallō.³⁰

B. *The Sanctuary at Gata*

Gata is located to the southeast of Kombolchā on a top of an elevated hill overlooking the Borkannā valley to the west of it. It is like the one at Jamā Negus, a major centre of saint veneration and the shrine of the celebrated scholar, mystic and reformer, *al-Hājj Bushrā* Ay Muhammad (d. 1863).³¹ Its emergence as an active Sufi centre of teaching dates from *al-Hājj* Bushrā's time, i.e., the early decades of the nineteenth century, although there is a tradition that the site had been a residence of important local Muslim families. His uncompromising position on a strict observance of Islamic law and his struggle against all forms of reprehensible innovation in matters relating to faith and practice, which are discussed later in the present chapter, earned him the respect and reverence of the contemporary ‘ulamā'. His reputation as a holy man and a source of *baraka*, as well as the belief in his efficacious power of intercession with God in order to assist those who invoked his name in times of distress, were the hallmarks of his veneration as a *walī*.

After *al-Hājj* Bushrā's death, his sanctuary emerged as a popular centre of pilgrimage second only to that of *Shaykh* Muhammad Shāfi‘ at Jamā Negus. Because of its proximity to a motor road, it attracts a large number of people from the neighbouring towns and villages, and even from other parts of the country.³² Its role as a training centre for Sufi novices and as an Islamic school seems to have gradually declined. However, the rituals and social milieux in which the annual *mawlid* celebrations take place show a close resemblance to those at Jamā Negus, except in one aspect of ritual: the beating of

³⁰ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Walé.

³¹ For a longer account of the man and his career, see pp. 104-13 below. The brief discussion presented here is based on a visit to the shrine in December 1984. See also my “*al-Hājj* Bushrā Ay Muhammad: Muslim Reformer, Scholar and Saint of Nineteenth-Century Wallō, Ethiopia” (presented to the International Conference on ‘Saints, Biographies and History in Africa,’ Mainz, 23-25 October 1997) (proceedings forthcoming).

³² The only published reference to the existence of the shrine at Gata is G. Hasselblatt, “Visit to a Qādiriya Mawlid Celebration in Ethiopia,” *al-Basheet*, III, 2 (1974), p. 58.

drums to accompany the singing of the litanies is strictly forbidden, and the custom is based on *al-Hājj* Bushrā's explicit injunction to this effect.³³

Another nineteenth-century shrine was that of Annā in northeast Wallo. It was a Sūfī centre founded by Jamāl al-Dīn Muhammād (d. A.H. 1299/3 February 1882 A.D.), who is considered to have been the most prolific scholar-saint in the whole country.³⁴ He was a disciple of *Shaykhī* Muhammād b. *Faqīh* Zubayr of Yajū by whom he was initiated into the Qādīrī order; hence he represented a link in the mystical chain of genealogy of the order. He also used to give his blessings to prospective pilgrims before their departure for the Hījāz.³⁵ His successor as head of the *ṭarīqā* was, as we saw earlier, Ahmad b. Adam of Dānā, another centre of local pilgrimage.

The shrine at Dānā, like those at Jama' Nēgus and Gattā, is situated on a majestic, elevated hill overlooking the Danakil plains in the east.³⁶ There is a well-built stone mosque in the centre of the compound and a number of smaller houses and huts around it which serve as resting rooms for guests and pilgrims. A water-pumping machine was installed not long ago; it was presented by an affluent Muslim residing abroad. According to one informant, in the time of *Shaykhī* Muhammād Zayn b. Muhammād Yāsīn (d. 1975), large quantities of dates used to be brought from Iraq by pilgrims during the month of *Ramadān*.³⁷ He also stressed the importance of Dānā as a Sūfī centre,³⁸ and that a large number of people still go there to spend the fasting month, and an even larger number during *Rabi'*

³³ The present guardian of the sanctuary, *al-Hājjī* Muhyī al-Dīn Ahmad, who is a direct descendant of *al-Hājjī* Bushrā, has recently revived the educational role of the centre. Some of the *‘ulamā’* who discussed with me the question of saint veneration discreetly expressed their disillusionment with the state of affairs prevailing around the shrines, especially the lack of intellectual focus and dynamism on the part of the present generation of descendants of the 19th-c. century scholar-saints, and their failure to maintain the tradition of scholarship, piety and reform that were the hallmarks of their more austere and illustrious forebears. They also disapproved of the glamour and extravaganza exhibited during the annual celebrations, and of the emphasis on style and ceremonial sophistication, rather than on preaching and teaching.

³⁴ Informant: *Shaykhī* Muhammād Tāj al-Dīn. *Shaykhī* Muhammād Wālī cited as ninety-nine the number of works on *dīnī* and *salawat* (intercessory prayers) composed by the *shaykhī* of Annā.

³⁵ Informant: *Shaykhī* Muhammād Jāmmā.

³⁶ I visited the shrine in 1975.

³⁷ Informant: *Shaykhī* Muhammād Wālī.

³⁸ Idem.

³⁹ G. Hasselblatt, "Islam in Ethiopia," *al-Basheet*, I, 3 (1972), pp. 19-20.

⁴⁰ Informants: *Shaykhī* Muhammād Wālī and Muhammād Zākī. The latter mentioned a hagiographical work by *Shaykhī* Ādām Eṣṣawī entitled *Niyafat al-Rahbāniyya fī Manāqib al-Dawawayya* (*The Divine Gift on the Virtues of the Saints of Dawawayya*), which I have not been able to consult.

⁴¹ For further details, see my "Traditional Muslim Education in Wallo," *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies*, 6 vols. (Moscow, 1988), vol. 3, pp. 94-106.

The earliest nucleus of Islamic education was the rural *zāwiyā*, a multi-functional institution which served both as a prayer house, a study and meditation centre, and a venue for a general meeting for the faithful where occasional and regular religious festivals and ceremonies were held. The *zāwiyā* represented the basis upon which Islam established itself in its formative stage of development, within agricultural communities, as a faith and way of life. Long before town mosques began to be built, it was around the *zāwiyā* that the early cultivators of Islam first organized the emerging Muslim communities and from where they began to propagate the new religion amongst the people of the surrounding villages and towns. In the context of indigenous Islam, the *zāwiyā* has been defined as a resting house for travellers, a gathering place where communal prayers (sing.: *dū'a'*) were held, and where the daily and weekly congregational ritual prayers were performed. It is distinguished from *mājid* (mosque) in that the latter was exclusively a place of worship and was, and still is, associated with urban centres.⁴²

Characteristics and Subjects

Islamic education in Wallo was traditionally offered, as in many parts of the Muslim world, by established scholars who were recognized for their mastery of the different branches of *īlm*. Generally speaking, because of the length of time required for acquiring proficiency in all the subjects, and because of the acute shortage of resources needed to pursue advanced studies, the various subjects were taught by different scholars residing in different places. Hence an important characteristic of the educational system has been the seeking out of these masters by itinerant students. Another feature which distinguished it from modern Western and Islamic education was the absence of a central institution or mechanism which managed the recruitment of students and teachers; the preparation, or acquisition and distribution, of teaching materials; the planning and implementation of a uniform syllabus; the determination of the duration of study; the administration of evaluation procedures; and the awarding of termination certificates. Another very important feature was that the whole educational system lacked the patronage and financial backing of the

local or regional authorities, but depended entirely on voluntary contributions and allowances made by pious and well-to-do cultivators and traders. The teachers had no salaries since their declared objective was the teaching of the principles of Islam, and the students had to fend off for themselves in the course of their training.

The range of subjects offered, and the nature and aims of the educational system, are similar to those of other centres of learning in the Islamic world.⁴³ Besides the Qur'ān and its exegesis (*tafsīr*), *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *Nahw* (Arabic grammar and syntax), *Sarf* (morphology) and *Tawīd* (theology) are widely taught, usually each under a separate master. Other highly specialized fields such as *Ilm al-balāgha* (rhetoric), *Mantiq* (logic), *Ārūd* or *Ma'āni* (prosody), *Bayān* (eloquence), *Baṣṭ* (the science of metaphors or of good style) and *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* (the principles of law) are not taught as extensively; *Hadīth* (the study of the Traditions of the Prophet) is a relatively late comer.⁴⁴ The life of the teachers and their students has been one of hardship as they had no regular means of subsistence. The teachers and their families lived on the produce of their own plot of land which was cultivated by their students and other members of the local community. Land (locally called *gulennā*) was sometimes donated by some of the Muslim chiefs of such areas as Albukko, Qāllu, Yajju and Warra Bābbo who sought the blessings and prayers of the teachers for their own well-being and the perpetuation of their power, not because they recognized the importance of the *ulamā'* as custodians of Islamic education and culture. The land was often of poor quality and was not held in perpetuity. When the *shaykh* died, it generally reverted to the donors who had paid the land taxes. Some of the prosperous peasants who had a relatively large plot of land also made voluntary contributions in grain at harvest time.

The students, called *darasa* or *qātellechā*, sought out their teachers in the various specialized fields of study. Many of them were supported by the cultivators and traders of the local community. Usually they were provided with morning and evening meals while some were allowed to live in the houses of their patrons. The patrons and sponsors of the students were known as *qallabi* (Amh.: provider of

⁴³ For West Africa, see Hiskett, op. cit., pp. 55-58.

⁴⁴ Informants: *Shaykhs* Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn, Muhammad Jamma and others. For a brief description of contemporary Islamic education, see Hasselblatt, "Islam in Ethiopia," pp. 19-22.

daily food rations). Others, finding no ready supporters, were obliged to walk up and down the village or town begging for food from door to door, and to spend the night with fellow students at the village *zāwiyya*. The daily routine of searching for provisions was locally known as *qarī'a* (from the Ar.: *qarī'a*: adversity or misfortune). Clothes for the students were provided by their own families or, if they were pursuing their studies far from their own villages, they had to go and work as daily labourers on farms in the lowlands helping with the harvest of cotton or red pepper, for which they were paid in kind. Then they would return to their village and give the cotton to the women residents to be spun and woven into robes.

Thus, on the one hand, the Sūfi centres of teaching fostered a tradition of literacy and conformity to Sunnī Islam, produced the professional men of religion and the later mystics, and acted as a channel through which new ideas emanating from the wider Muslim world were diffused. On the other hand, the local shrines, which evolved out of them, served as a point of contact between orthodoxy and the mass of believers, and fulfilled the desire of the people to have a direct and active personal experience of the faith by participating in the rituals and collective acts of worship and through the veneration of deceased saints. The annual festival of the Prophet's birthday held at these shrines has also been considered as one of the factors which induced large-scale individual conversions to Islam of local Christian pilgrims visiting the shrines. This was made possible by the impact of the intensity and ardour with which the litanies were recited and which produced a state of psychological alertness among non-Muslims who, in moments of total concentration and absorption, declared their intention to convert, and were subsequently recognized as full members of the Muslim community.⁴⁵

The Wallo Sūfi Scholars and Reformers

Muslim oral and written traditions in Wallo today ascribe the rise to prominence of the ancestors of important scholarly and saintly families who flourished in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the intellectual inspiration which they gained while on pilgrimage or dur-

ing the course of their training in the Hijāz and the neighbouring Muslim lands. There they also met the contemporary representatives of established or emerging mystical orders by whom they were either initiated or inspired. They undertook certain esoteric soul-searching exercises and meditation in anticipation of mystical and spiritual insight and guidance. Finally, it is widely believed that they received specific verbal instructions and authorization from the heads of the orders, or direct revelation, often in the forms of dreams and visions, from the Prophet. The principal message was concerned with the specific means of prosecuting their religious mission upon their return home.⁴⁶ It must be borne in mind that prior to their pilgrimage, some of them had experienced a general disillusionment with the religious state of affairs prevailing in their own local communities, and had even taken specific measures either through constant exhortation or, in some cases, the use of force, in order to introduce and implement reforms and to win converts to Islam. We will now turn to a discussion of the lives and careers of three of the most famous representatives of the revivalist and scholarly, and militant, tradition of Islam in Wallo who lived in the period under review.

The earliest Wallo Muslim reformer, mystic and scholar whose reputation and achievements are preserved both in oral traditions and written sources,⁴⁷ is *Shaykh Muhammad Shāfi* b. *Asqārī* Muhammad. Born at Durē near Lake Hayq in Warra Bābbo, he is believed to have died at the age of sixty-three in A.H. 1121/1806/7 A.D.,⁴⁸ which makes ca. 1743 A.D. the year in which he would have been born.

⁴⁵ On the role of dreams and visions in the lives of mystics, see Trimmingham, *The Sūfi Orders*, pp. 72, 158, 59, 190.

⁴⁶ The following account of his life and achievements is based on oral data and on hagiographies written about him: a) *Nasīhat al-Murīdīn* (Advice for Novices) by his son, *Faqīrī* Muhammad Nūr and b) eulogies composed in verse about his life in direct descendant of *Shaykh* Muhammad Shāfi and keeper of his shrine at Jama Negus, the late *Shaykh* Sayid Muhammad of Kombolchā, and *al-Hājjī* Sālih Yāsīn of Arba Mench for allowing me to consult the texts cited above.)

⁴⁷ According to *Shaykh* Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn, his father's name is Tāhir, but *Shaykh* Muhammad Sa'īd said that was the name of his grandfather. In the *Jāmi* verse already cited, *Asqārī* Muhammad is also given as his father's name and this is confirmed in an unpublished treatise composed by *Shaykh* Muhammad Shāfi entitled *Māzīnat al-Faqīr* [The Succour of the Needy]. The manuscript was kindly shown to me by *al-Hājjī* Sālih.

⁴⁸ *Shaykh* Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn, *Fālām*, p. 36; Mahmud b. Sulaymān al-Tijāni, *Kiāb Sharī'at-Sūdir fī'l-Hijāz li-thikr Id al-Milād al-Nūr bi'l-Faqīr wa'l-Surūr* (in manuscript), pp. 16ff.

After receiving his early formal education, he was initiated into the Qādiriyya order by *Faījh* Zubayr of Gwāgur in Yajju, who gave him the *yāza* to teach it in the territories lying south of the Mille River. Therefore, he first travelled to Garfā where he was warmly received by the ruler, *Imām* Yūsuf b. ‘Umar (d. A.H. 1231/1815 A.D.), to whom he disclosed his mission and plans for the propagation of Islam. The *mām*, who was a fervent Muslim himself, provided him with armed men and supplies so that he could carry out his mission. The Christian communities in Reqqē and Arummā were subsequently coerced to embrace Islam, after several armed clashes with the forces of *Shaykh* Muhammad Shāfi, who also fought the Muslims of Reqqē because of their laxity in the observance of Islam. They were accused of negligence in performing the prescribed ritual prayers which he claimed they had failed to recognize as obligatory acts of worship. The *shaykh* felt that Islam at the popular level was in a debased state and that people were spending more time on rituals and ceremonies than on discharging their religious duties. He also blamed the ‘*‘ulamā’* for misleading the community and for their complacency, selfishness and avarice, as they were only interested in amassing gifts from the ordinary people rather than in teaching and implementing the canons of Islam.⁵⁰

Shaykh Muhammad Shāfi’s influence gradually extended further west to Boranā where he introduced amongst the Oromo- and Amharic-speaking populations a more orthodox form of Islam compatible with the Sharī‘a. He then settled at various places in Dawway. At Namo he had several *zāwiyas* constructed and obtained *waqf*-lands from the contemporary rulers.

He spent a number of years at one of the *zāwiyas* which he had established as a teaching centre for the consolidation of Islam in the region. He taught the Qur‘ān and its commentaries, and mysticism (*tazawwuf*).

He then transferred the base of his activities to Jāmmā in Boranā. The local chief called Jawhar received him and gave him extensive *waqf*-land. Mosques were also built. The area as far as Ahayyā Faji on the frontier with Shawā was brought under the spiritual jurisdiction of the *shaykh*, and a rigorous Islam was firmly established. He also undertook the task of converting the local Christians and attempted to reform some of the local customs of the Oromo inhab-

itants. Thus he ordered them, once they had converted to Islam, to shave the long hair which the young men customarily wore.⁵¹ He also forbade the use of butter as a cosmetic applied to the hair because it was allegedly an animist practice.⁵² It was from his retreat at Odā that he launched his military campaigns and carried out his reforms. It is related that while he was on an expedition against the Christians in the neighbourhood of Aheyyā Fajj, his son, called Mujāhid, was killed in action.⁵³ He then returned to Namo from where he moved to Albukko. The local lord, one *Abū Jārsā*, welcomed him and granted him the district of Errēnsā as *waqf*-land. This event took place just before the “rains of ashes” (Ar.: *rānād*).⁵⁴ The place which eventually became known as Jamā Negus, after the *shaykh* had settled there, used to be called Mutti. The district hereditary chief, having heard of his reputation, invited him to come and establish his centre there, promising him to make the surrounding area a *waqf*-land for him. When *Shaykh* Muhammad Shāfi arrived at the head of a large body of armed followers, consisting of his disciples and students, the chief is said to have expressed his amazement at such an impressive sight by saying: “This is indeed no ordinary *qālechā* but a king (*negus*).” The area was thus given a new name, Negus; Jamā being the Amharic corruption of the Arabic *jamā‘a* (community).

After settling down at Jamā Negus, *Shaykh* Muhammad Shāfi set about organizing his community and began devoting his time to furthering the cause of Islam in the surrounding areas. Accordingly, he divided each year into three parts during each of which he concentrated his efforts on a specific activity: the first four months were allocated for teaching (*tadris*), the second for prosecuting the *jihād*, and the third for prayer and meditation (*dhu‘k*) which he performed privately at his *khalva*.

This was no haphazard routine devised by the *shaykh* to carry out his mission but a consciously through-out programme of reflection

⁵¹ Idem.

⁵² On this, see Huntingford, *The Galla of Ethiopia*, p. 28.

⁵³ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Taj al-Din.

⁵⁴ According to a local fragment of Arabic manuscript, this occurred in A.H. 1210/1795-6 A.D. This is probably a reference to an unusual snowfall. (An outbreak of smallpox is also reported for this year). Similar fragments, which are possibly variants of the same source, confirm this event which is dated seven years before the death of *Imām* Ahmad b. Muhammad ‘Alī of Warra Himano at the Baule of Ilālā in 1803.

and action. It is the present writer's view that this represents an original intellectual contribution by an Ethiopian Muslim scholar to the development of a concept of a vigorous Islam in perpetual renewal and expansion through a balanced and harmonious combination of mystical exorcise, education and physical coercion intended to extend the frontiers of Islam. *Shaykh Muhammad Shāfi* was attempting to free Sunism from its excesses and to bring about a reconciliation between mysticism and the rigidity and barrenness of dogmatic Islam. While the *jihād* ensured the survival and integrity of the Muslim community and conformity to scriptural Islam, the *dīn*, through the medium of meditation and other spiritual exercises, emphasized the mystical dimension of religious experience and helped to narrow the gap between the elite and the commonality of believers. Teaching and learning guaranteed renewal and continuity, and helped maintain contact with other Muslim centres of education, both local and foreign. The local chiefs shared the zeal and commitment of *Shaykh Muhammad Shāfi* for the expansion of Islam to which he contributed immensely through military effort, (hence his epithet: *mujāhid*, by which he is commonly known), as well as in his capacity as a recognized head of the Qādiriya order, and in his role as a teacher and prolific writer. He is the author of about thirty, as yet unpublished, treatises amongst which are the following:

Mā'nat al-Faqīr (The Succour of the Poor)

Daqāiq al-Mā'iṇa (The Intricacies of Succour)

Wāsiṭat al-Asnā (The Radiant Way)

Ādāb al-Hadra (The Proprieties of [Sūf] Gathering)

Shijā' wa Marākiz al-Dīnā' (Recovery and the Position of the Weak)

Hujjat al-Sādiqīn (The Proof of the Truthful) and

Kāshī al-Karb (Disclosure of Distress).

Traditions suggest that *Shaykh Muhammad Shāfi* had a well-organized force of warriors which could be deployed both for jihādic forays and for the defence of his community, and in assisting hardened rulers of his time. The commander of his fighting force was a certain 'Abd al-Salām, the *shaykh* of Soqā, who was given the title of *bāshā* after one of his most successful expeditions in which he had distinguished himself as a tactful warrior. Disguising himself as a Christian soldier, he entered the enemy camp and lured the troops to a pre-arranged spot, and he and his followers fell upon the wan-

guard cavalry. The rest of the enemy troops were overpowered and defeated. *Shaykh Muhammad Shāfi* also assisted the Warra Himano ruler, *Imām Abba Jēbō*, alias Muhammad 'Alī, by sending him several contingents of warriors in order to repel an invading army from Bagēndir. The *imām* had appealed for the *shaykh*'s help using Islam as a means of winning his support, even threatening him that unless he came to his aid, he might consider abandoning the faith in the event of his defeat. The *shaykh* therefore sent his troops who engaged the enemy at Korēb and succeeded in saving the *imām*'s territory from destruction and ruin.⁵⁵ However, the *imām* betrayed his former ally and turned against him on suspicion that the *shaykh* might be harbouring political ambitions and seeking his overthrow. The *shaykh*'s men avoided direct confrontation and retreated south to Jāmmā. The justification for such an action was that the *shaykh* did not wish to shed the blood of fellow Muslims. But the *imām* incurred the wrath of the *shaykh* who cursed him for his hypocrisy and treachery.

An important event in the life of *Shaykh Muhammad Shāfi* which had a marked influence on his career as a reformer and leader was his pilgrimage to the Hijāz where he is believed to have spent two eventful years.⁵⁶ One of the objectives of his travel to the holy places of Islam was to seek and receive inspiration and guidance as to how best he could implement his mission. He believed, at this stage of his career, that only through the *jihād* could the work of the revival and consolidation of Islam be achieved, since the traditional mechanisms like teaching and preaching, and the activities of the Sūfī orders, had apparently been ineffective and of limited success in establishing a truly orthodox Muslim society. Accordingly, he undertook the pilgrimage with about twenty of his disciples. On his way to the coast, he met a Tigrayan *wāli* called *Sayyid Burkayy* who prayed for his safe journey and encounter with the Meccan *ghauḍah* (lit: succour, 'Helper of the Age': head of the *aṣlījā').⁵⁷ Before his departure for the Hijāz and after his return, he had also consulted*

⁵⁵ This episode might well be a reference to an expedition to Shawā' led by Emperor Takla Giyorgis (r. 1779-84) in 1783/84 when, on his return journey, he was attacked by the forces of *Abba Jēbō*. Zergaw, "Some Aspects," p. 31; Abir, *Emperor of the Princes*, pp. 149-50; Bielli, "Ricondi Storici," pp. 95-96, n. 41; H. W. Elblundell (trans.), *The Royal Chronicle of Abyssinia 1769-1840* (Cambridge, 1922), pp. 60-61

⁵⁶ Informant: *Shaykh Muzaaffar*; but three years, according to the *Ajāni* verse and *Shaykh Muhammad Wale*.

⁵⁷ *Ajāni* account in verse.

the local saints on the advisability of launching a *jihād*, and had received their sanction and blessings.

However, the *shaykhī*'s plan to lead a holy war against unbelievers was not apparently approved of by the religious authorities in the Hijāz.⁵⁸ According to an informant, when he sought a legal pronouncement from *Sayyid 'Aqil*, the contemporary *muftī* of Mecca, sanctioning the use of force for the cause of Islam, the latter is believed to have replied: "Fight your own carnal soul (*jāhid nafsak*)". The *shaykh*, however, remained determined to prosecute his mission through warfare. He visited the Prophet's tomb at Medina where he stayed for some time. Through a vision the Prophet disclosed to him that there was an alternative means by which the same objective could be fulfilled: the annual celebration of the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid*). It is related that this became institutionalized soon after his return from pilgrimage.⁵⁹

Shaykh Muhammad Shāfi is believed to have possessed *karama* which became manifest on many occasions. On one of them, it is believed that he turned the horses of his warriors into oxen for slaughter at a time of a chronic shortage of provisions during a campaign. When a local chief took away the *shaykhī*'s land and sent his tenants to plough it, the *shaykh* called down God's wrath and all perished. On his last expedition, he spent the night at a place called Billā and proceeded to Maqdāsa where he fought against the Christians of Manz. A fierce battle ensued and many Christians and Muslims lost their lives. On his way home *Shaykh Muhammad Shāfi* fell ill and instructed his surviving followers to take him to Jamā Negas to be buried there in the event of his death. He also told them not to disclose publicly the news of his death until after they had reached home for fear that the chief of the district through which they were passing might want to have the body buried in his own territory. The *shaykhī* also added that if the chief caught up with them, they should put down the body and remove the cover placed on it. However, the district chief, having heard the rumour of the *shaykhī*'s imminent death, intercepted his followers in order to take possession of the body. When he approached them, he discovered that the

shaykh was still alive—he even greeted him and assured him that he had recovered from his illness. The chief, thinking that he had been misinformed, took his leave, and the *shaykhī* died shortly afterwards.

Such was a fitting end to the career of one of the most articulate and influential reformers and jihādists of Muslim Wallo. The fact that he died while still engaged in a *jihād*, and after having worked a miracle, not only added to his reputation as a defender of the faith and possessor of *karama*, but also showed that he still held onto his firm belief in the *jihād* of the sword as an instrument of religious propagation,⁶⁰ in spite of instructions he had received while in the Hijāz to concentrate on a peaceful means to achieve his goal.

One of the earliest and most distinguished Wallo mystics and reformers was *Shaykh Ja'far Bukko b. Siddiq* (1793–1860) of Gāttirā in highland Wallo.⁶¹ His father, *Siddiq* *Bukko* (d. 1800/01), was a well-known mystic who is believed to have worked miracles and encountered al-Khiḍr,⁶² who had made the prophecy that he would have an illustrious son. *Shaykh Siddiq* was also at odds with the secular leaders of his time. This background of paternal piety and spirit of defiance of established religious and political authority, had a strong impact upon the development of *Shaykh Ja'far*'s character and his career as a reformer.

After receiving his early education in various subjects, he is supposed to have met al-Khiḍr who inspired him to undertake a religious mission to various places in southern Wallo. *Shaykh Ja'far* was particularly noted for his outspokenness and uncompromising stance on questions related to faith and practice. Such was the high esteem with which he was held that he, on one occasion, brought about the reconciliation between *al-Hājj Bushrā* and *al-Hājj Madanī*, a contemporary scholar, who were on the brink of fighting against each

⁵⁸ In his own work, *Māimat al-Faqīr*, p. 3, he explicitly emphasizes the timeliness of prosecuting a *jihād*, for he wrote: "ib annahu akandamu fi 'hadha t-waqf."

⁵⁹ The account of his life and career presented here is entirely based on an unpublished Arabic hagiography entitled *Misk al-Adħfar fi Manaqib Sayf al-Haqqaq al-Shaykh Jaffer* (The Pungent Musk on the Virtues of the 'Sword of Truth' *Shaykh Jaffer*), written by his son, *Kayħiż Muhammad* around 1885. I am grateful to *Shaykh Muhammad Nur Umar* who kindly allowed me to consult a recent copy of the work prepared by his father. For a more detailed study of the contents and importance of the text, see the present writer's "Introducing an Arabic Hagiography from Wallo" in Taddesse Beyene (ed.), *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, vol. 1, pp. 185–97.

⁶⁰ See below, n. 72.

⁵⁸ For some interesting parallels in the life of the Soninke leader, Muhammad al-Amin, see Humphrey Fisher, "The Early Life and Pilgrimage of al-Hājj Muhammad al-Amin the Soninke (d. 1887)," *JAH*, XI, 1 (1970), esp. pp. 59–60.

⁵⁹ Informant: *Shaykhī* Muhammad Walē; Mahmūd, *Kiħb Sharh al-Sudur*, p. 116.

other over the issue of the latter's claim to be a *wāli*. *Shaykh* Ja'far had also the reputation of being an ascetic and a rigorous missionary-traveller (*sayyāḥ*) who established many Sufi centres and acquired *waqf*-land for their maintenance.

Shaykh Ja'far showed a strong commitment to the abolition of certain practices and rituals associated with the chewing of *chāt* leaves⁶³ and vehemently opposed the traditional officials who were responsible for the rituals. The excessive veneration of *chāt*, and the belief that only the *abbā gār* and his other lesser associates could intercede with God to answer the prayers of ordinary people in times of adversity, and the claim that they possessed the power of foretelling the future, aroused the *shaykh*'s indignation and condemnation. He even took open, physical measures to do away with such reprehensible customs by destroying the houses in which the rituals were performed. Although the victims attempted to obtain compensation by appealing to Adarā Bille, the contemporary chief of Laga Gora (d. 1855), he was shrewd enough to turn down their appeal because of his fear of *Shaykh* Ja'far's reaction.

An intense struggle was also waged by the *shaykh* against members of the Muslim religious establishment such as judges and reciters of the Qur'an because of their apparent indifference to, and violation of, Islamic law, especially their unlawful appropriation of the *zakāt* and offerings made at funeral services which were meant to be distributed amongst the needy and poor. He also condemned the prevailing and uncanonical hereditary principle of succession to the office of the *qādi*, according to which a son could take over after the death of his father. *Shaykh* Ja'far once called a meeting at which he exposed the deviation of some of the judges and, having failed to obtain their repentance, proceeded with their dismissal from office, and appointed others in their place. One of those who had been disgraced appealed to the woman ruler, Warqiu, for justice, but she was unable to help him. *Shaykh* Ja'far also stood against the prevalence of adultery and disapproved of the traditional Oromo law of inheritance which was highly unfavourable towards women; the right of primogeniture; and the fact that women did not receive bridal money.⁶⁴ The central issues on which *Shaykh* Ja'far and the traditional as well as Muslim religious authorities were so divided did not merely

reflect a rivalry between a reformer, on the one hand, and those who had vested interests to protect, such as the ritual leaders, the Muslim judges and officials, on the other. It also represented a cleavage between the survival and persistence of some elements of the old beliefs and practices, and the emergence of a regenerated orthodox Islam—a cleavage which could not be bridged by the prevailing Islam as practised by the contemporary *'ulamā'*. Moreover, the conflict transcended questions of pure dogma and practice: it also embodied the incompatibility between the prevalence of customary law and the application of the Shari'a; hence it had religious and social dimensions which affected both the Muslim elites and the community at large.

Shaykh Ja'far also waged his struggle on a third front: against the secular authorities whom he accused of showing utter disdain for the Muslim clerics and of their deviations from Islam. He constantly exhorted Adara to rule according to the revealed law and castigated other chiefs like him because they lived in seclusion and luxury, and were insensitive to problems affecting the community. His biographer wrote: "He was not afraid of the blame of the blamer in the enforcement of the command; and for this reason, he struggled against the magistrates, oppression [lit.: darkness] and the rulers."⁶⁵ He added that *Shaykh* Ja'far "used to say to the *'ulamā'*: 'we are engaged in the *jihād* when we observed the ruler's intention to keep the people blind with "food" [by providing worldly pleasures] meaning exercising oppression,'"⁶⁶ and hence a *jihād* had to be launched against them.

One of the most frequently recurring charges levelled against the *'ulamā'* by *Shaykh* Ja'far was their slavish subservience to, and dependence on the favours of, the rulers. Although he maintained a cool and guarded relationship with a few chiefs, he consistently avoided any dealings with most political office-holders throughout his life. In fact he seems to have had an abhorrence for temporal authority. His biographer relates that his father used to quote *al-Hāfi* Bushrā's saying: "Power is the source of uncleanness."⁶⁷ *Shaykh* Ja'far refused to recognize Adara's legitimacy as a hereditary ruler.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 23: "wakāna la yakuf laxmal al-'āmma fi tanyāl al-umr walidhā kāna harjan 'alā j-quddha wa'l-zulma [sic] wa'l-salāṭīn."

⁶⁴ On this, see below, n. 85.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24: "wakāna yaqūl lāl-'ulamā': nahnu fī-jihād lammā ra'aynā al-salāṭīn arādhū an ya'nu al-nās bi-l-akīd ya'nī al-zulm."

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16: "al-rīyāsa 'ayn al-najāsa."

As the biographer remarked, one of the main obstacles to *Sawkh* Ja'far's programme of reforming the existing system of the administration of justice and the legal disposal of charitable alms, as well as changing the traditional laws of inheritance, was the lack of goodwill on the part of the secular authorities and the religious notables.

One of the well-known and highly-revered traditions about the revival of Islam, which was preceded by a crisis and an attempt to resolve it without reference to an external source of sanction, concerns the remarkable and influential luminaries o

career or one of the *ulamā* — Wallo Islamic mysticism and orthodoxy. He was a distinguished representative of the *‘ulamā* who were recognized for their scholarly achievement, piety and sanctity, and for their endeavours to bring about renewal and reform. His name is *Sayyid* Bushrā Ay Muhammad (d. A.H. 1279/1863 A.D.) whose *nibrā* (ancestral line) is linked to the celebrated Andalusian mystic, Muhyī al-Dīn b. al-‘Arabī (1165–1240 A.D.).⁶⁸

In 1863 he was called *Mirādavā* in Ifāt⁶⁹ to a

Sayyid Bushrā was born at a place called Mataqlayā in Ifāt⁶⁹ to a pious family: both his father and mother, Rādiya,⁷⁰ were noted for their mastery of traditional Muslim education. He therefore grew up in an environment that was conducive to imbibing and cultivating deep religious knowledge about a range of Islamic subjects.

As a young boy he was entrusted to a local *qâtim* who resided at a nearby village called Ammoy Malasây where he began his religious studies. An anecdote is related to illustrate an early sign of his possession of prodigious intelligence. During the early days of his training in the study of the Qur'ân, his teacher once asked him to

⁶⁸ Informant: *Sayyid* Muzaaffar. The present guardian of *Sayyid* Bushrā's shrine at Gata, about 20 km. southeast of Kombolchā, also bears the forename of the great Sūfi mystic. The biographical account presented here is largely based on a lengthy interview with *Sayyid* Muzaaffar. According to him, the 'genealogical line', preserved in Arabic, is as follows: "Sayyid al-Bā' , who is *Sayyid* Bushrā b. Ay Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Suayman b. Aw Muhammad b. Aw Ahmad b. Muhyi al-Din b. al-'Arab... b. Hasan al-Muthanna b. *Sayyid* Hasan b. 'Alī wa *Sayyidatina* Fātimā." See also title-page of *Sayyid* Bushrā's published work, *Mukājāt al-Ilāhiyya*. However, this claimed relationship to Ibn al-'Arabī needs to be taken as a symbolic spiritual link, perhaps intended by *Sayyid* Bushrā to acknowledge his inspiration by the Sufi thinker, rather than as evidence of real genealogical descent, taking into consideration the fact that more than six centuries separate them, unless each of *Sayyid* Bushrā's ancestors up to the generation of Ibn al-'Arabī lived to be a centenarian. See further my "*At-Hāj*" Bushrā Ay Muhammad".

⁶⁹ Sec further my "Al-Hājj Bushrā Ay Muhammad Jāmmā.

⁶⁹ Informant: *Shaykh Muhammadi*

pronounce and repeat the first few letters of the Arabic alphabet, but the pupil read out only the second letter, *ba*? When the teacher ordered him to say: *alif*, and threatened him with a cane, he is believed to have exclaimed: "Mā ma'nā al-*ba*?" [What is the meaning of *ba*?]⁷¹ The teacher was greatly overwhelmed with wonder and perplexity at such an extraordinary outburst of prodigy, taking into account the pupil's tender age, and reported the matter to his father. However, the father dismissed the incident and ascribed the son's behaviour to the influence of other older boys, and sent him back to receive further instruction.

¹¹ The Arabic letter, *ba'*, has a mystical meaning: P.M. Holt, *The Makhist State in the Sudan 1881-1898* (Oxford, 1958), p. 122, n. 2.
¹² Or al-Khadir. A figure who plays an important role in popular legend and story. In Sufi circles, he is regarded as a *wali par excellence*. In north-central Ethiopia, among Muslims, Saturday is popularly designated as the day of al-Khidr (or *Sayyid Khadr*, as he is known locally), and is observed with a variety of rituals enough even by some Christians, especially in the main towns. His help is sought after in matters relating to wealth and he is therefore the patron saint of merchants. He is supposed to be still alive because he had drunk from the "spring of immortality", *mād at-harati*.

Eyyazanggâch ejvâne
asâddagachew ejvâne
By extending her [i.e., al-Khidr's] hands
she [he] made her [his] son [i.e., Bushrâ] grow
(prosper).⁷³

The incident gave rise to a commotion in the village and the young boy's mother was overwhelmed with grief, although his father tried to calm her down. Later on the boy regained his natural physical appearance.

Upon the completion of the Qur'an, Bushrā began the study of Islamic law under a local *fāqīh* residing at a place called Nurābīsa,⁷⁴ with whom he later travelled to Arṭūmā, where he continued to receive his training.⁷⁵ Shortly afterwards, the *fāqīh* was summoned by Muṭī Dāwūd b. Abī Bakr of Dawway to assist him with the administration of Islamic law, as he was the only one consulted on legal matters by the contemporary Muslim chiefs. Therefore, he and his students went and settled at a place called Grān Ambā. However, the *fāqīh's* legal pronouncements on certain issues were not regarded as authoritative by members of the local community because of their long allegiance to Muṭī Dāwūd as chief arbiter and judge. Even students assigned to study under the *fāqīh* did not stay long enough to complete their education. Thus the *shaykh* of Nurābīsa informed the *muftī* of his intention to return home, but he was eventually persuaded to stay. From amongst the prosperous members of the trading and farming community, the *muftī* was able to collect allowances which were sufficient for the upkeep of some forty of the *fāqīh's* students. While at Grān Ambā, *Sayyid* Bushrā received the blessings of Muṭī Dāwūd for his loyal and exceptional services as a *khalādim* (lit.: servant). He is also believed to have had an encounter with *Sayyid* Ahmad b. Ṣalīḥ,⁷⁶ who made the prophecy about his journey to "Għarb" (the Sudan).

Sayyid Bushrā continued to receive further instruction under his old master, who used to spend part of his time dispensing justice, while his disciple was engaged in teaching some of the younger students (*darsās*). The relations between the *fāqīh* and the *muftī* deteriorated on account of a legal dispute over the local belief that some people had the power to transform themselves into wild animals.⁷⁷ The *shaykh* of Nurābīsa therefore left Dawway and set out for the

Sudan together with *Sayyid* Bushrā and some of his other disciples. As the most senior and favourite disciple, *Sayyid* Bushrā carried his master's waterskin in the course of their journey. After a long and arduous travel, they arrived at Umdurmān where *Sayyid* Bushrā subsequently completed his education and obtained the blessings of his master. Thenceforth he became a *shaykh*.

At Umdurmān *Shaykh* Bushrā and his master met *Sayyid* Ahmad al-Tayyib b. al-Bashir (d. 1824), the head of the Sammāni order, to whom they expressed their wish to be initiated by him. The *shaykh* of Nurābīsa had a widespread reputation for his scrupulousness in ritual cleanliness. It is related that after his clothes had been washed, they were never left to dry unguarded for fear of being spoiled by birds' droppings; he therefore used to assign some of his *darsās* to take turns to watch over them until they became completely dry. When the Sammāni *shaykh* invited him to his house, it is said that he had the floor of his *khalāva* swept clean with a mixture of water and cows' dung which, according to the Maliki rite, did not defile ritual cleanliness. The *shaykh* of Nurābīsa was very reluctant to step into the *khalāva* and showed excessive caution lest his clothes be spoilt, whereas *Shaykh* Bushrā was totally indifferent and sat on the floor to greet his host.

In due course, *Shaykh* Bushrā's Ethiopian teacher was advised to concentrate on teaching while he himself was admitted into the mystical school for training and initiation. The Sudanese mystic intimated to him that since *Sayyid* Ahmad b. Ṣalīḥ had already "revealed to him the inner secrets (*asrār*) of the Qādiriyya", all what was required of him was to retire to a cave near Kharrioum in order to recite and study the Sammāni *dhikr* and master its rituals.

While absorbed in meditation and reflection, *Shaykh* Bushrā became aware of his whole body undergoing a physical and emotional agitation. When he gazed out of his retreat, he observed that all forms of life and motion had come to an abrupt standstill, whereupon he was shaken and began sobbing. He sent a message to *Shaykh* Ahmad al-Tayyib expressing his distress and remorse for having become an instrument of affliction (*balā'*) rather than of compassion (*rahma*). He was immediately summoned and given a different kind of *dhikr* which he subsequently memorized and recited. He again experienced the same change in his physical and spiritual state, but when he looked out from his cell, those elements and objects which had stopped moving earlier regained life and motion. When this was disclosed to

⁷⁴ According to *Shaykh* Muhammad Jāmmā, Nurābīsa is a place near Kārrā Qorē, 119 km. from Dessie on the main road from or to Addis Ababa. *Sayyid* Bushrā's teacher in *fiqh* is remembered as *fāqīh*, or *shaykh*, of Nurābīsa. His real name was Muhammad Nūr. Celebrated scholars and saints of Wallo are usually addressed and better known by the name of the centre where they taught and lived. Such a practice is also regarded as a sign of deference.

⁷⁵ He also received some of his early education at Qorātē: *Shaykh* Muhammad Jāmmā.

⁷⁶ It will be recalled that he represents the link in the Qādiriyya *silsila* between Haar and Wallō; see chart in Chapter II, pp. 69-70.

⁷⁷ There are no details on the respective position taken by the two scholars on the matter. However, the anecdote suggests that certain traditional beliefs had survived well into the period under discussion.

the Sammānī *shaykh*, he publicly declared that *Shaykh* Bushrā had successfully accomplished his mystical exercises, and asked him to stay closer to him. An invisible voice or caller (*hāfiq*) is believed to have proclaimed the following:

*Man ra'a al-bushrā
falahu al-bushrā
lām tamasrah al-nār*

Whoever sees Bushrā
will have glad tidings
[that] hellfire will not touch him.⁷⁸

Shaykh Ahmad al-Tavyib gave instructions that *Shaykh* Bushrā should go out naked riding a camel towards the market so that people would be saved from eternal damnation by gazing at his whole body.

It is believed that *Shaykh* Bushrā spent about twenty-five years in Umdurmān, although there is no other source to confirm this claim. While there, he mastered a wide range of subjects (sing.: *fāmī*), including geometry/surveying (*īm al-handasa*) which he studied under a certain *Shaykh* Ya'qūb. He was also exposed to the doctrines of other mystical orders such as Naqshbandiya, Khalwatiyya, Ahmadiyā and Shādhiliyya. One *Shaykh* Ya'qūb of Ḥalanqa gave him an *yāzā* (licence) to teach the Qādiriyya.

At this juncture the *shaykh* of Nurābīsā asked the Sudanese *fiqhāhā* to give their legal opinion about the issue over which he had disagreed with *Muftī* Dāwūd, and they confirmed the correctness of his position. Then he and his followers decided to go on the *hajj* and travelled overland through Egypt and Syria. While in the Hijāz, *Shaykh* Bushrā met Muhammad 'Uthmān al-Miġrāni from whom he received the Khatmī *wird* which begins with: "Allāhumma aqīmā . . ." (Oh God, reward us . . .). He also entrusted him with a mission (*fāthī*; lit: conquest) to exert his efforts for the cause of Islam, and gave him his blessings for success. It is said that on the day that he received al-Miġrāni's authorization, a letter arrived from *Shaykh* Jamāl al-Dīn Muhammad of Anna⁷⁹ asking him for the same, but he was directed to get it from *Shaykh* Bushrā himself.

In due course, the *shaykh* of Nurābīsā and *Sayyid* Bushrā left the Hijāz (the former was to die after returning home). They travelled by boat across the Red Sea and landed at Massawa. Then they continued their journey to the interior and reached Hawzēn where they spent some time. *Shaykh* Bushrā married a local woman who bore

him two daughters called Maymūna and Nafīsa. He is also believed to have met *Shaykh* 'Alī of Gondar who made a prophecy about the place where *Shaykh* Bushrā would finally establish his centre in an area where the names of five persons and places began with the letter *bā'*.⁸⁰ He also gave him a cow to be slaughtered whenever he camped for the night, and disclosed to him that the cow would be one of the signs by which the final site of his settlement would be revealed. It is believed that wherever he camped, he used to have the cow slaughtered and to give instruction to his companions not to throw away the skin and bone. The dead cow was then miraculously brought back to life several times in the course of their journey. All this continued to happen until they reached the neighbourhood of Gaṭā where the cow eventually died. Only *Shaykh* Muḥammad Qaribu, one of his companions, refused to eat the cow's meat on the ground that he objected to the cow being compelled to go through the agony of slaughter and death several times. *Shaykh* Bushrā responded by saying that he tolerated the matter out of respect for *Shaykh* 'Alī's instruction, and in recognition of his power of miracle-working.

Gaṭā, the place where he finally settled, had been the residence of other local *shaykhs* such as Abā Ṣūfiyya whose daughter *Shaykh* Bushrā was to marry. It was in fact from him that he obtained the permission to establish his centre there. *Shaykh* Bushrā began teaching the Qur'ān, theology, law and Arabic grammar. He especially concentrated on training his disciples in the repetition and study of *awrād* and *adkār*. His acquaintances in the Sudan began to arrive with their students; one was *Shaykh* 'Abd al-Kāfi, a Mālikī who was living in Walqāyet and came with four hundred students. Apparently he wanted to teach according to the Mālikī rite but was advised by *al-Hāfiq* Bushrā not to do so, since only the Shāfi'i and Hanafī were the predominant schools of law in the area. Another Sudanese scholar was a certain *Shaykh* Muhammad Numayrī, who was a *muftī*. Therefore, the scholarly and lay community at *al-Hāfiq* Bushrā's centre gradually began to acquire fame and influence as both the local and foreign 'ulamā' joined him in increasing numbers.

⁷⁸ Informant: *Shaykh* Muzaaffar.

⁷⁹ He introduced the Qādiriyya order into Rāyā: see Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 241.

⁸⁰ These were: Bushrā, Borkannā, a major river, Berru, the contemporary potestate of Qāllū, Berriū, his consort, and Baklā, a nearby plain: informant: *Shaykh* Muhammād Jāmānā. He also stated that the prophecy was made by *Shaykh* Ahmad al-Ḥāfiq. *Shaykh* Bushrā's other honorific sobriquets are: *Sayyid al-Bā'* and *Abū l-Faqīl* ("Father of [spiritual] Emanation"). He is also popularly known as Gatey or the *Shaykh* of Gaṭā.

Al-Hājj Bushrā was especially renowned for his strict observance of the Shari'a and for his struggle against all forms of *bida* (innovation). An informant said that the *shaykh* fought those Muslims who deviated from the divine law more fiercely and consistently than he did the unbelievers, and that he was therefore considered as the most orthodox amongst his contemporaries.⁸¹ He regarded the neglect of the obligatory ritual prayers as a lapse into infidelity (*kuf*) and exhorted his disciples not to mix freely with women both in their religious and social life. His ideas are expounded and elaborated in several of his treatises such as *Minhat al-Hājija* and *Kashf al-Haqā'iq*.⁸² *Al-Hājj* Bushrā put less emphasis on the *jihad* as an instrument of enforcing conformity to the canons of Islam, and more on peacefully reforming the existing religious norms, behaviour and practices of the Muslim community.

The main targets of *al-Hājj* Bushrā's perpetual and unrelenting struggle were certain un-Islamic survivals such as the ritual of the *zār* (the cult of spirit possession), *gohadan* (the ceremonial site, usually under a tree, where ritual sacrifices were offered),⁸³ and the beating of drums.⁸⁴ He was especially opposed to the *gohadan* rituals because ordinary people worshipped the sites, and he regarded this as an act of idolatry. He prohibited the excessive consumption of *chāt*,⁸⁵ and its veneration, and strongly condemned the belief that

⁸¹ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Walt.

⁸² He also authored the following treatises:

Kiāb Tanzih al-Miyārad min qā'ib wa 'āmal... (Book of deanthropomorphism in words and deeds...)

Kiāb Hādīqat al-Ruknān fi shahr ramadān (Book on the Garden of the Brethren)

Kiāb Niyāfat al-Rahmān fi shahr ramadān (Book on the Gift of the Compassionate in the month of Ramadān)

⁸³ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Walt. Etymologically, it is derived from the Oromo word, *gabbiad*; a communal grazing land: Conti Rossini, "Uggeràt, Raia Galla . . .", p. 16.

⁸⁴ The beating of drums to accompany pious songs on religious and social occasions is still not allowed at Gata—a fact that distinguishes it from other centres of local pilgrimage.

⁸⁵ *Cathha edulis* or *celsus edulis*. Amharic: *chāt*; Arabic: *qāl*. The tender leaves of this shrub are chewed and the juice has a stimulating effect. There is some literature on its origin and botanical characteristics: Bob G. Hill, "Cat (*Cathha edulis Forsk.*) JES, III, 2 (1965), pp. 13-24, but there is as yet no proper study devoted to a discussion of its role in the social and religious life of the Muslim communities of Ethiopia. See a recent study by Ezekiel Gebissa, "Consumption, Contraband and Commodification: A History of Khat in Harerge, Ethiopia, c. 1930-1991" (Ph.D. thesis, Department of History, Michigan State University, 1997). For a tradition about its origin and dissemination, see Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 228, n. 1; the article on *Kāt* in *EI* new ed., IV, p. 741; Bassett (ed.), *Histoire de la Conquête*, p. 63, n. 1; Huntingford (trans.), *Magnizi: The Book of the True Knowledge . . .* pp. 8-9;

prayers made at *chāt*-chewing sessions could assist the participants in obtaining divine favour for the fulfilment of their wishes. He exchanged views on the subject with the *shaykh* of Annā who was not averse to the consumption of *chāt*. *Al-Hājj* Bushrā once told him that his hostile attitude towards it was only insofar as it was becoming an object of veneration (*lāzīm*) with which the *shaykh* of Annā agreed, adding that it was because *chāt* was so insignificant and trifling that it was spat out after it had been chewed. In the time of *al-Hājj* Bushrā, it was only on rare occasions that *chāt* was consumed at Gata, as when *Shaykh* Ja'far Bukko paid him a visit.⁸⁶ At other times he exhorted people to refrain from too much indulgence in it.

Sayyid Bushrā's strictness, and high ethical and religious standards, aroused the jealousy and opposition of not only the traditional leaders of ritual ceremonies (the *abbā gārs*),⁸⁷ but also of the ordinary clerics (*qālechā*)⁸⁸ and the rural reciters of the Qur'an (*qurrā'*). Another category were the exorcists (*fugrā*),⁸⁹ whose activities he had also condemned. On the other hand some of the contemporary chiefs, such as Berru Lubo of Qallu, and those of Albukko and Dawway, held him in much awe and respect. He was especially on good terms with Berru, who attended to his requests and needs.⁹⁰ Other members of the 'ulamā' also sought *al-Hājj* Bushrā's friendship because

and W. Cornwallis Harris, *The Highlands of Ethiopia*, 3 vols. (London, 1844), II, p. 344n. On an earlier controversy surrounding the consumption of *chāt* in the time of *Shaykh* Husayn, see E. Cerulli, "I Sidamo e lo Stato Musulmano del Bālī", in his *L'Islam di ieri e di oggi*, pp. 340-44. For a recent study, see Tim Carmichael, "Chewing the Leaf of Allah: *Qat* and *Qat* Culture in Harar and Addis Ababa" (a paper presented to the 'Africa: Past, Present and Future' Conference held at the University of California at Los Angeles, 15 April 2000).

⁸⁶ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Walt. On *Shaykh* Ja'far, see above pp. 101-104.

⁸⁷ A phrase of Oromo provenance still in use in Wallo. See Conti Rossini, op. cit., p. 17, n. 38: "abbā gar e colui che dirige la preghiera".

⁸⁸ Also an Oromo word meaning magician-priest, but Islamized to mean a lower-grade scholar or student. See Trimingham, op. cit., pp. 200, 201, 262 n. 2, 263, 264; Conti Rossini, op. cit., p. 15.

⁸⁹ These were people who claimed to have the power to drive away evil spirits through an orgiastic ritual dance accompanied by the beating of drums. They were usually dressed shabbily and filthily, and grew their hair long. The word is a corruption of *fugrāt* (pl. of *fugr*, a Sūfi mendicant).

⁹⁰ Informant: *Shaykh* Muzaaffar (15 February 1983) said that *al-Hājj* Bushrā was an intimate friend (*sāhib*) of Berru. However, there were some who openly questioned the chief's religious commitment. One such figure was a certain *al-Hājj* Muhammad Yasin who reprimanded Berru for his indulgence in, and toleration of, wine-drinking. Berru had him expelled for his audacity. Although *al-Hājj* Bushrā tried to bring peace between them by criticizing Berru and advising him to appease *al-Hājj* Muhammad Yasin with a land grant, they were never reconciled. Informants:

whenever they needed land, he would approach Berru to have land granted to them, arguing that since they were engaged in the task of spreading Islam and in teaching, they deserved the means for their sustenance.

Al-Hājj Bushrā was considered a *walī* and hence a possessor of *karāma*. According to an account related by one of his descendants to an informant, while *Sayyid* Bushrā was travelling to visit and pray for his father at his grave in Hāt, he passed through a Christian village in Gedem, where he met a young boy carrying a bundle of ripe sugar cane. When he asked him to give him some, the boy refused. The *shaykh*, thinking that such a rebuff was a bad omen, followed him to his house. The boy's father, a priest, offered the *shaykh* and his companions a warm hospitality for the night. He also gave him some choice sugar cane from the bundle that the boy was carrying. After a year, *al-Hājj* Bushrā passed through the same village and stopped to greet his old benefactor, but was grieved to learn that he had died and been buried a few weeks earlier. The *shaykh* immediately asked to be taken to the grave. When he reached there, he called out the priest by name to which the latter answered. He then miraculously restored his life and had him recite the Islamic doctrinal formula before he died. His body was duly washed and a funeral prayer performed over it.

There is a tradition that Tewodros II, alarmed at the political implications of the growing popularity of the *shaykh*, sent out a message to him, promising to appoint him as ruler over the territories which had been formerly under Berru's control. He therefore asked him to come down to the Bakke plain with his followers for consultation. However, forewarned by a disciple of his who was in Tewodros's camp that the invitation was only a ruse to capture him, the *shaykh* fled to Argobba and Arqumma, and a few of his followers who had stayed behind, were caught and killed by Tewodros's men. The significance of this episode,⁹¹ although not confirmed by any contemporary source, lies in the fact that it testifies to the wide-

spread influence and reputation of the *shaykh* at the time. It also helps us to establish the chronology of his life and career. *Al-Hājj* Bushrā died from illness in A.H. 1279/3 February 1863 A.D.⁹² and was buried at Gata in the *khatāba* of one of his *murādīs*. He was succeeded by his son, *Shaykh* Walē, as a *khalīfa* and guardian of the sanctuary, but not as a *shaykh al-tarīqa*.

The biographical accounts and traditions about the lives and achievements of the three reforming mystics and scholars provide an insight into, and shed considerable light on, the interaction between indigenous Islam and external intellectual currents emanating from the wider Islamic world. They also testify to the diversity of circumstances in which possibilities for the renewal and further expansion of regional Islam could, and did, flourish, and to the challenges which it had to contend with. On the basis of the oral and written traditions about the rise and activities of these religious leaders, it is possible to perceive the enduring vigour and vitality of Islamic scholarship, the intellectual sophistication of the 'ulamā', the range and originality of their initiatives and programmes of reform, and the local limitations on the fulfilment of their objectives. It is also evident that in spite of the long history of Islam in Wallo, traditional forms of religious worship and behaviour had persisted into the nineteenth century—an ideal situation which provided both the background to, and justification for, the formulation and execution of ideas of Islamic reform initiated by a new class of militant 'ulamā' who had been exposed to, and gradually inspired by, the upsurge of Sufi revivalism.

Although the intellectual roots of these reforms originated outside Wallo, and indeed outside the country, the credit for adapting the new ideas to local conditions, and for sustaining a high degree of continuity of the reformist tradition and a persistent challenge to established conservative clerical and secular authorities, clearly belongs to the indigenous scholars. They combined exceptional qualities of leadership and organization, scholarship and sanctity, and developed

⁹¹ It should be remembered that Tewodros was engaged, in the period 1855-59, in several campaigns to bring about the submission of the Wallo rulers, though without any success. See Rubenson, *Survival*, p. 173; Donald Crummey, *Priests and Politicians: Protestant and Catholic Missions in Orthodox Ethiopia, 1850-1868* (Oxford, 1972), p. 126; idem, "Tewodros as Reformer and Modernizer," *JAH*, X, 3 (1969), pp. 466-67, and PRO, FO 1/9-11: Plowden's dispatches to the Foreign Office, from 1855 to 1859. See also Chapter VI below.

⁹² It was a certain *Sayyid* Muhammad b. Bashūr (also known as Abā Tayyiba), who had been initiated by *al-Hājj* Bushrā himself, who gave the funeral sermon which he concluded with the following sentence, the letters of which have numerical values corresponding to A.H. 1279, the date of his master's death: "għidha budurakim bā' u" ["Bā' u (*al-Hājj* Bushrā), who is (like) your full moon, has gone down."] Source: various informants.

their own ideas of transforming certain aspects of contemporary Islam and of abolishing the vestiges of traditional belief and ritual which compromised Sunnī Islam. They also attempted to establish a community of believers who were committed to safeguarding the tenets of Islam and to achieving this through various mechanisms and strategies, both by peaceful and coercive means.

One of the most enduring legacies of these early reformers was the sense of identity and solidarity which they bequeathed to conscious members of the Muslim communities in subsequent years. The Muslim uprisings of the 1880s in Wallo were partly inspired by them. The other legacy is the continuing importance of the mystical orders in present-day social and religious life which is manifested in the annual visits to their shrines, and the preservation of indigenous Muslim scholarship which is evident in the several works which the scholar/saints themselves composed, and in those which they inspired others to write.

The task of this chapter is, firstly, to discuss, on the basis of the limited available evidence, the emergence and development of a number of regionally-based political entities in Wallo during the period under review; secondly, to see if there was a link between their rise and Islam; and thirdly, to determine the degree to which the ruling elites of these principalities were committed to the further expansion and consolidation of Islam. We will in particular look into the traditions about the rather complex relationships which existed between the *'ulama'* and the Muslim rulers of the region in order to show how the latter were caught between, on the one hand, the political imperative of maintaining their hereditary power, which entailed submission to Christian overlords, often to the extent of relinquishing allegiance to the Muslim faith, and on the other hand, loyalty to Islam which not only was demanded of them by the Muslim clerics, but was also the basis of their own legitimacy as rulers over the Muslim communities within their domains. We will also briefly discuss the role of the cavalry in the organization of the Wallo chiefdoms. Hence, the chapter is a study of Islam from the point of view of regional political organization, and of the presumed role played by the Muslim faith in the reinforcement of dynastic power. Herc, as in the present study as a whole, the focus of discussion is Wallo south of the Bashlo River and part of eastern Wallo, thus excluding Yaju and Lāstā which had long-standing provincial dynasties and whose history and political fortunes were heavily influenced by the involvement, especially of Yaju, in events taking place in the imperial court at Gondar.

In the first chapter, it was suggested that the settlement of the Oromo in Wallo had given rise to a reordering of the pre-Oromo social and political structure and to the emergence of a new social order in which the new conquerors and settlers gradually constituted themselves as a military elite whose leaders became virtually independent chiefs exercising political power over the indigenous subject populations. It was also noted that, at a later stage in the evolution

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CHAPTER FOUR

of those formations, the new settlers were able to carve out territorial enclaves of their own from the dismembered provinces of the mediaeval Christian kingdom. We have already considered the tradition of an Oromo group that settled in eastern Wallo and then, by means of dynastic intermarriage with members of the indigenous aristocracy and slow infiltration, established a principality in Warra Himano. By the late eighteenth century, it had extended its suzerainty over a substantial part of central Wallo. Although the governors of Amhara¹ continued to be appointed either by the emperors at Gondar or by their Yaju mentors, beginning from the second half of the eighteenth century, the power of the emperors continued to decline and their jurisdiction over Amhara was confined to the territories north of the Bashlo River and to Amārā Säyent in northwest Wallo proper, and even that was increasingly being challenged by the Warra Himano princes from their administrative centre at Tanta.

The Imāmate of Warra Himano

We have already spoken of the early traditions of origin of this principality. It was by no means the oldest Oromo dynasty in the region, although it was the earliest for which we have some oral traditions and travel accounts. Other smaller chiefdoms and local hereditary ruling houses had existed since the seventeenth century, but we have no contemporary records on their social and political organization, and on the territorial extent of their influence. One of these was that of the Arloch whom the Mammadoch of Warra Himano were to supplant.

It is believed that the eponymous ancestors of the ruling family of Warra Himano hailed from Arsi around the turn of the eighteenth century and settled at a place called Māmmad in Garfā. Among the settlers was a certain Godānā Bābbo, a Muslim Oromo cleric who was able, from his base in Garfā, to extend his influence slowly over Tahuladarē in the northwest. There is no reason to doubt the Muslim Oromo origin of the founders of the ruling house, although its genealogy, constructed much later,² might have been

influenced by the need to buttress its legitimacy by linking it with a well-known pre-sixteenth-century mystic, *Shaykh* Nūr Husayn of Bālē.³ The genealogy is, therefore, chronologically unsound since there is a gap of a century and a half between the time that the *shaykh* is believed to have flourished and the date when Godānā and his followers settled in Garfā.

The history of the principality of Warra Himano from the early decades of the eighteenth century is one of rapid territorial expansion from its nucleus in Garfā which then shifted towards Warra Himano. It also demonstrates that its rulers adopted and pursued a vigorous policy aimed at the consolidation and expansion of Islam.⁴ The ruling dynasty was called the Māmmadoch, a term whose origin has been variously explained: a claim to Sharifian ancestry, a derivation from Māmmad, the site in Garfā where they first settled; or even, as Brielli suggests,⁵ from the name of the ruler who is associated with the establishment of the principality on a firm basis.

The first member, and founder, of the dynasty whose name is preserved in the traditions collected by Brielli was Godānā,⁶ not ‘Alī,⁷ who was his son and successor. Godānā’s success in welding power and establishing a hereditary and autonomous enclave is an exceptional case of a Muslim cleric exploiting his credentials as a religious notable to achieve a political objective. It also explains why his later successors

Storici,” p. 91, n. 34. According to an informant, the genealogy of the Māmmadoch was constructed by Iyyāsu (r. 1913–16) as late as the early 20th century: *Amit Ahmad*. He also hinted that the ancestors of the Warra Himano rulers had settled in Ifat and Argobba before they moved on further north. See the genealogical table in the Appendix, p. 203.

³ Cerulli, “L’Islam nell’Africa Orientale,” *L’Islam d’ieri e di oggi*, p. 104. However, in his “Pubblicazioni Recenti dei Musulmani e dei Cristiani dell’Etiopia,” *Oriente Moderno*, VIII, 9 (1928), p. 430, he makes *Shaykh* Husayn a follower of the Ahmadiyya order, which is an anachronism, since its founder, Ahmad b. Idrīs, flourished from 1760 to 1837.

⁴ With the notable exception of the last effective ruler of the dynasty, Muhammad ‘Alī who, in the words of *al-Hāfi* Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn, “opened the door for apostasy,” through his conversion to Christianity in 1818 when he took the baptismal name of Mikā’el. See Chapter VI. A century earlier, another member of the dynasty (who curiously also had the same name) had adopted Christianity for much the same reason. See below, p. 122.

⁵ Brielli, op. cit., p. 95. Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 199, refers to the Māmmadoch claim to Persian ancestry.

⁶ Brielli, p. 91.

⁷ Fekadu, “A Tentative History . . .” p. 3. The tradition that ‘Alī accompanied Grāñ and that he was the first ruler to spread Islam in Wallo (loc. cit.) is a clear case of telescoping an 18th-century event back to the 16th.

¹ For instance, Goshu in the second half of the eighteenth century: Blundell (trans.), *The Royal Chronicle of Abyssinia*, p. 207 (trans.).

² Conti Rossini stated, rather vaguely, that the claim to descent from *Shaykh* Nūr Husayn was made after “the conversion of the Wallo” to Islam: in Brielli, “Ricordi

inherited his religious fervour and commitment. It thus demonstrates that Islam was effectively used as an ideology for building up a local power base and for pursuing a policy of territorial expansion.

According to Brielli's account of the coming of this Muslim Oromo immigrant group, Godānā had with him four brothers⁸ named Sirro, Marfā, Daganado and Gulbo who owned large stocks of animals which they tactfully used to attract and win the goodwill of, and form an alliance with, the Arloch, another Oromo group that had arrived earlier and ruled over Sagarat and the neighbouring districts of Masqalā, Legot, Tahuladarē, Wartāya and Jārri. Godānā soon obtained recognition as a vassal from the chief of the Arloch and received the right of administering some districts. He also married Fātīma, the daughter of the governor of Tahuladarē, who bore him a son, 'Alī. Hence, through the mechanism of material generosity and a policy of appeasement and dynastic marriage, Godānā was able to lay the foundation of a Muslim ruling family whose authority was to last for nearly two hundred years.

'Alī (r. ca. 1756–71), successor of Godānā, married a lady from the local nobility called Libbiyat who was the daughter of a certain Tēwodros. Her father came from a Christian family which ruled over Wādlā and Dalāntā. Muhammad, 'Alī's son, was born out of this wedlock. Brielli's account does not say whether the marriage involved the conversion of one or the other partner. It is not impossible, although rather unlikely, that 'Alī changed his religion for political and military reasons, as Conti Rossini suggested.⁹ If he did so, he had set an early precedent for his late nineteenth-century descendants who, as we shall see in the last chapter of this study, received baptism in return for recognition by the Christian rulers as hereditary overlords of Wallo.

The most important development during the reign of 'Alī Godānā was his successful revolt against the Arloch predominance and the extension of his suzerainty into those territories which had until then been under the sway of the Sagarat chieftains.¹⁰ This marked the beginning of the founding of Warra Himano as an independent principality which gradually expanded its influence from Garfa northwards to Warra Bābbo and westwards to Tahuladarē, and then to Warra Himano proper, where it established its centre at Tantā.

The reign of Muhammad 'Alī (r. ca. 1771–85), *alias Abba Febo*, (his traditional "horse-name"), was important in two respects: the further expansion of the domain of the Māmmadoch and the consolidation of Islam. Muhammad was an astute and ambitious potentate who succeeded in establishing his position in Warra Himano and in making an attempt, the first of its kind in the history of the region, at bringing the various petty Oromo chiefdoms under his central authority. Therefore, his activities can be regarded as an exercise in effecting a regional political integration out of the disparate and warring district enclaves which had been in existence in Wallo for the preceding one hundred years.

What were the means by which such a goal was achieved? There is no information in the extant sources which could throw light on the internal political and social structure of the contemporary society, and on the human and material resources which were available to the dynasts. However, from the scattered references in the traditions to both Muhammad 'Alī's character and his achievements, there emerges a clear picture of the ways in which he successfully mobilized the loyalty of his own followers and the support of the Muslim religious notables in order to achieve territorial and political aggrandizement.

Firstly, it is related that his initially modest military power was strengthened by a large number of disaffected Muslim troops who joined his forces after they had deserted their master, a certain Dori, the grandson of Rās Wadājé, the last Gondarine appointee over Amhara, because of his alleged "haughtiness and avarice".¹¹ The episode portrays the extent of the growing influence of Muhammad 'Alī for, in the unsettled conditions of the early *Zamana Masāfēt* (the warlord era), soldiers of fortune tended to shift their allegiance and render their military services to the strongest provincial lord who appeared to be capable of sustaining campaigns of expansion and of rewarding them profusely with rich booty and land. Thus, this additional source of military manpower might have been one of the factors which enabled Muhammad 'Alī to consolidate his position and harass the army of Emperor Takla Giyorgis, and to launch a counter attack when it was returning from a projected campaign to Shawa.

⁸ Not sons: Zergaw, "Some Aspects . . ." p. 19.

⁹ In Brielli, p. 91, n. 36.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 92.

The rise of Muhammad 'Ali to prominence can therefore be placed in the context of a wider development affecting the Wallo region: the expedition undertaken by the emperor in 1782-83 which was aimed at the subjugation of the Wallo and the Wuchälé.¹² The emperor marched through Wädlä and secured the submission of Baṭṭo, the Wuchälé Oromo chieftain and son of Muhammad 'Ali who had left him there to be in charge of Warra Himano and Maqdälä while he was attempting to bring the territories of southern Amhara under his control.¹³ The emperor then issued a proclamation to the effect that the other Wallo chiefs should follow Baṭṭo's example,¹⁴ and then proceeded to the south and received the submission of more chiefs, especially one Manāsho who, however, refused baptism, and Lubo, who was made to convert to Christianity.¹⁵ Further on, the chronicler of Takla Giyorgis relates that the Chufa clan was baptised, and that a certain Wabasho, chief of Malzā, prepared a banquet for the emperor and the army commanders.

However, this apparently smooth and triumphal imperial march through highland Wallo was also marked by bloody encounters with pockets of stiff resistance which led to much destruction of property and loss of lives on both sides. This protracted expedition culminated in a fierce battle fought at the fortress of Legot in March 1783 between the forces of Muhammad 'Ali and those of Takla Giyorgis from which the latter emerged victorious over the former "pagans".¹⁶ From the long account of the campaign to Wallo, a number of conclusions can be drawn about the political conditions prevailing in the region in the late eighteenth century. Firstly, the fragmentation of the area south and east of the Bashlo River into rival chiefdoms was of immediate and long-term importance for the history of Wallo. Secondly, among these entities, the strongest one was the emerging and expanding principality of Warra Himano under Muhammad 'Ali. Thirdly, each of the various units pursued its own policy *vis-à-vis* the Christian imperial court in Gondar. Fourthly, it was Muhammad 'Ali who attempted to challenge imperial intrusion which is a further testimony to his power and ambition. Although victory over the combined forces of the emperor and his northern allies

eluded him, the initiative for later resistance remained with him and the military reverse did not constitute a serious setback to the programme of expansion and internal consolidation which was to be implemented during the time of his successors. In Abir's view, Takla Giyorgis's expedition to Shawā and Wallo failed because of the resistance of the Wallo chiefs and the insubordination of his vassals.¹⁷ In fact, by this time, Muhammad 'Ali had succeeded in establishing his power over the whole of Warra Himano.¹⁸

The second feature of Muhammad 'Ali's reign is the fact that he is remembered as a fervent Muslim ruler who appointed religious notables and attempted, through them, to eradicate certain vestiges of animist worship, practices and traditional customary laws, and to impose Islamic law.¹⁹ Although we have no detailed information on the nature of those practices, the tradition suggests that Muhammad used Islam as a basis for consolidating his power by seeking and obtaining the support and sanction of Muslim scholars and jurists. It is conceivable that his inclination to make the Sharī'a the basis of the prevailing legal system owed its inspiration to the presence and pressure of the reformist elements within the traditional clerical class who were the precursors of the better-known revivalists and reformers to be discussed in the last chapter.

Trade also played an important role in the consolidation of the dynasty, although on a limited scale, for it was in the time of Muhammad's successors that trade expanded for reasons to elaborated in the last chapter: the general revival of commerce and the opening of the Täjura route which linked the port through Awsā to the main markets in southeastern Wallo and thence to the interior. However, there is a tradition which makes the early Māmmadoch themselves a mercantile family specializing in the trade of incense who later gained political prominence in Warra Himano.²⁰ If this was true, then the Māmmadoch must have utilized their revenue from such trade to build up their power base and to form alliances with their potential rivals.

¹² Blundell, op. cit., pp. 269-303.

¹³ Zergaw, op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁴ Blundell, op. cit., p. 273.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 281-91.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 289.

¹⁷ Abir, "Ethiopia and the Horn," p. 573.

¹⁸ Brielli, loc. cit. Conti Rossini quotes the chronicler of Takla Giyorgis as saying that Muhammad 'Ali had been appointed as a representative of the Wuchälé by the emperor; however, there is no reference to this in the relevant passage of the text.

¹⁹ Brielli, loc. cit.

²⁰ Zergaw, op. cit., p. 23 (note).

Brielli gives a very early date, about 1780, for the death of Muhammad 'Alī near the *Challaqā* River while trying to subdue Ibrāhim, the lord of Garfā.²¹ However, this event must have taken place towards 1785, for, as we saw earlier, Muhammad 'Alī was still alive in 1783 when Emperor Takla Giyorgis laid siege to the fort of Legot.

There is very little oral²² and written²³ material on the reign of Muhammad 'Alī's successor, Battō, who ruled for five years (1785–90). His mother, Alko, was a lady from Legot. Battō subjugated Qāllu, Warra Bābbo and Garfā, and other eastern districts. It is also known that he had been to Gondar where he was coerced to embrace Christianity in return for being conferred the title of *rās*, and that he died of smallpox before he returned to his province.²⁴ During the campaign of *Ras* 'Alī of Yaju (d. 1788) in 1787, Battō had taken part in the capture of the fortress of Maqdalā,²⁵ an action which, considering that the fortress was within Warra Himano territory, is difficult to explain unless it can be interpreted as a consequence of internal disorder following his father's death.

Battō left a young son who, owing to his minority, could not establish his power as an effective successor; so Battō's brother and Muhammad 'Alī's son, Amadē Kolāsē, or Amadē "the Elder", took over. Brielli says that Amadē stayed in power for twenty-five years.²⁶

Like the reign of his predecessors, that of Amadē was also an active one as it witnessed the further expansion of the principality of Warra Himano. It was Amadē who completed his father's plan of territorial aggrandizement by incorporating the districts of Amhara into his domain. The *imāmate* which he established extended as far south as the *Wanchit* and *Jamā* Rivers and as far west as the *Abbāy*. In the east the rulers of Garfā and Qāllu acknowledged his over-lordship. In the north he temporarily occupied Dāwunt and Dalāntā. In 1798 he even managed to capture the imperial capital, Gondar, on two different occasions, and to put his own nominee on the throne.²⁷

For the expedition to Gondar his army was divided into four sections: the first under Berellē Ergo who commanded the troops from Amārā Sāyent, 'Alī Bēt and Abbay Bēt; the second, led by Billē 'Alī, consisted of troops from Laga Ambo, Laga Gorā, Warra Ilu, Jāmmā and Boranā; the third was under Endris [Idrīs] Boru leading those from Qāllu and Reqqē; while the fourth was under the command of Māreyye and comprised the troops from Tahludarē, Warra Abbechu [Bacho], Warra Wāyyu, Warra Tāya and Warra Bābbo.²⁸ Thus Amadē Kolāsē was able to mobilize the troops of all of the major contemporary chiefs of historical Wallo which is a testimony to his influence and power.

According to a local tradition, Amadē had the call to the Islamic ritual prayer announced from the tower of one of the castles in Gondar as a symbolic gesture of his triumphal entry into the city, and perhaps to emphasize his religious zeal. The same tradition also maintains that Amadē undertook the expedition in order to avenge Battō's forced conversion to Christianity.²⁹ Abir wrote that Amadē raided Bagēndē in alliance with the warlords of Gondar and the central provinces.³⁰

Like his father, Amadē was committed to strengthening the position of Islam in Wallo. In order to legitimize and sanctify his hereditary power, he is believed to have obtained a written authorization from Mecca that permitted him and his descendants to assume the honorific title of *imām*.³¹

Amadē died while trying to put down a revolt jointly led by the governors of Laga Hidā and Laga Gorā in 1803 in a skirmish fought at a place called Yelālā/Illālā.³²

²⁸ Zergaw, p. 49.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 50.

³⁰ Abir, "Ethiopia and the Horn," p. 574.

³¹ Brielli, p. 101. The title of *imām*, which the Warra Himano princes from the time of Amadē, not Muhammad 'Alī (Zergaw, p. 36n), adopted, did not suggest the usual esoteric and religious connotation with which it is conventionally associated. It was employed as a symbol of their allegiance to Islam and their position as heads of a Muslim principality. This becomes evident if we keep in mind that they are also mentioned in the literature with Christian military titles such as *dajāzmač*, which might have been used as a device to show their nominal submission to their Yaju overlords and the Gondarine emperors.

³² Brielli, op. cit., p. 102; Fekadu, op. cit., p. 5; Zergaw, op. cit., p. 51. This is confirmed by local Arabic fragments.

²¹ Brielli, op. cit. p. 95.

²² Zergaw, p. 37.

²³ Conti Rossini in Brielli, op. cit., p. 96, n. 41.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 96.

²⁵ Blundell, op. cit., p. 379.

²⁶ Brielli, op. cit., p. 101, which must be wrong because Amadē died in 1803 (see below). In local Arabic sources, Amadē is known as Ahmad.

²⁷ Brielli, p. 96, n. 42.

Liban, *akīs Abbā Jēru* (d. 1815),³³ Amadē's son by a lady from Yaju,³⁴ inaugurated his reign by having the rival claimants to the *imāmate*, including his brother, 'Abd Allāh, and other members of the Mammadoch family, incarcerated at the fortresses of Maqdalā and Legot. Liban then devastated Laga Hida and the neighbouring districts. He has been described as a "violent and vindictive" man who, for a period of seven consecutive years, subjugated the districts which had rebelled against his father.³⁵

Having assumed the title of *imām*, he actively encouraged the propagation and expansion of Islam. His religious enthusiasm, it is claimed, had led him to desecrate some of the local churches and turn them into mosques.³⁶ In fact he died, says the contemporary chronicler, while on a campaign to convert a local Christian community to Islam.³⁷

Liban was survived by three sons: Amadē (*Abbā Muŷā*), who succeeded him, 'Alī (*Abbā Bullā*) and Bashir. Amadē Liban, according to Krapf, converted a large number of Christians of Warra Himano.³⁸ The French traveller, Antoine d' Abbadie, brother of Arnauld, claims that Amadē had been suspected of being in secret communication with Muhammad 'Alī of Egypt who sought Amadē's collaboration in conquering and converting northern Ethiopia.³⁹ Amadē also headed the regency council on behalf of the young *Rās* 'Alī II of Yaju.⁴⁰ Amadē Liban died in 1838 and was succeeded by Liban who was renowned for his Islamic fervour and was considered as the defender of Islam: a "Muhammad".⁴¹

Liban was an ambitious ruler who, even before he assumed the hereditary governorship of Warra Himano, had been involved in raids against neighbouring territories. In May 1799 he led an armed incursion into Gāyent that resulted in the burning down of churches. In

³³ Not 1825: Fekadu, loc. cit.

³⁴ Brielli, loc. cit. According to oral evidence, her parents came from Amārā Sāyent and Gojām: Zergaw, op. cit., p. 52.

³⁵ Brielli, op. cit., p. 103. Liban's action against his own kinsmen might have been influenced by a similar custom of the mediaeval Christian kings: see Chapter I, pp. 11–12.

³⁶ Blundell, op. cit., pp. 487–88.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 488.

³⁸ Isenberg and Krapf, *Journals*, p. 362.

³⁹ Abir, *Era of the Princes*, pp. 105, 114–15, 117; Rubenson, "Ethiopia and the Horn," p. 63, PRO, FO 1/8, f. 324v. See also Rubenson, *Surval*, p. 367, for another and later Amadē Liban who allegedly wanted to ally himself with the Egyptians in the 1870s.

⁴⁰ D'Abbadie, *Douze ans*, I, p. 183; Rubenson, "Ethiopia and the Horn," p. 61.

⁴¹ Isenberg and Krapf, op. cit., p. 347.

In 1805 he launched an expedition to Maqēt in Lāstā and three years later, when *Rās Walda Sellāsē* of Endartā, Tegrāy, attacked Yaju, he intervened to make peace between him and Gojī, the ruler of Yaju.⁴² Liban is believed to have had a large force of warriors consisting of an estimated 10,000 men armed with muskets, and his domain was quite extensive, particularly after the annexation of Dāwunt.⁴³

In 1841 Liban was deposed by order of *Rās* 'Alī Alula and the hereditary governorship of Wallo was given to 'Alī Liban, father of Muhammad 'Alī, who was later to convert to Christianity. The period which followed Liban's deposition was characterized by rivalry amongst the offspring of *Abbā Jēru* Liban which intensified and continued until the coming to power of Tewodros II in 1855.

Other Wallo Chieftains

Although not territorially as extensive and politically as influential as the principality of Warra Himano, there were a number of local dynasties in southern, southwestern and eastern Wallo. One of the biggest was Qällū whose rulers claimed control over the upper basin of the Borkannā River. On its northeastern and eastern frontiers were the smaller chiefdoms of Garfā and the western districts of the territory of the southern Afar. Its northern, and often hostile, neighbours were Warra Babbō and Tahuladarē. On the west the Qällū rulers claimed suzerainty over Albukko, which separated it from Laga Gorā. Antōkiyā was on its southwestern border while Arjummā in the south was considered to be within its sphere of influence. Its claim of overlordship over Dawway, although bitterly contested by the Reqqē hereditary nobility,⁴⁴ remained effective for a long time. The capital of Qällū was Ayn Ambā, close to the market of Anchārro. Qällū was also known as Argobba although the latter term had mainly an ethnic/linguistic connotation, and applied to a geographically specific area: the district to the east of Ayn Ambā.

⁴² Conti Rossini's note in Brielli, op. cit., p. 102; also Henry Salt, *A Voyage to Abyssinia, and Travels into the interior of that country* (London, 1814), p. 293.

⁴³ Brielli, op. cit., p. 103 (note).

⁴⁴ For a brief discussion of the revolt led by a certain Abbé Mansūr of Dibbi against Berru Lubo of Qällū, see Harris, op. cit., II, pp. 350–51. According to an Arabic fragment, Berru dismissed Māshello of Reqqē and appointed Gobazē in A.H. 1251/1835 A.D. Abbe Mansūr was the first hereditary chief of Reqqē: Conti Rossini, "Uggerat, Raia Galla . . ." p. 17, n. 58.

The earliest ruler, and possibly founder, of the Qāllu dynasty whose name is preserved in local oral traditions was Amitō who lived in the early decades of the eighteenth century and controlled a large part of southeastern Wallo. His daughter was later to marry the Gondarine emperor, Iyyāu II (r. 1730–55). The reign of their son, Iyo'as (r. 1756–69), saw the beginning of the rise of Wallo political dominance in the court of Gondar, when Amitō's sons and Iyo'as's maternal uncles, Lubo and Berellē, secured important positions of authority. Berru Lubo, as mentioned in the last chapter, ruled Qāllu in the 1830s and 1840s, and was a direct descendant of Amitō, his grandfather. His own father, Lubo, was therefore a contemporary of the Warra Himano prince, Muhammad 'Alī.⁴⁵ According to Harris, Berru Lubo's territory extended from the frontier of southeastern Tigray in the north to the border with northeastern Shawā in the south.⁴⁶

Qāllu controlled the commercially important district of Dawway which had a direct access to the port of Tajura through Awsā. The former's rulers therefore depended, more than any other of the contemporary chiefs of Wallo, on the revenue from long-distance trade. That is why they were engaged in frequent clashes with the hereditary chiefs of Dawway and with Qāllu's northern neighbours.

To the west of Qāllu were a number of petty dynasties: Laga Gorā, Laga Ambo, Laga Hidā and Jamma further the south. Among these we know more about Laga Gorā because it seems to have maintained and exercised some sort of indirect control over the others. Only Billē, his son, Adarā, and grandson, 'Alī, are remembered in the local traditions and mentioned in some written sources. The ruling dynasty was known as the house of the Gāttiroch, a term derived from its centre at Gāttirā.

To the northwest of the territory under the control of the Gāttiroch were the independent chiefdoms of 'Alī Bēt, Abbay Bēt and Gimba whose forefathers were the members of the Chufā family: Abbay (a contemporary of *Abbā Jebō* of Warra Himano), Katamē and 'Alī. The fourth local dynasty in Wallo during the nineteenth century was that of Boranā under Wadajē Berru.

It is worth noting that the various ruling groups in Wallo were organized around the clans of the different fractions of the Oromo

which had settled in the region since the late sixteenth century.⁴⁷ This can be inferred from the names by which they have been known in the literature and oral traditions. Hence, the element of ethnic identity and solidarity seems to have played some role in the initial stages of the formation of these political entities. Indeed as the French traveller, Arnaud d'Abbadie, remarked, the basis of political organization of the Wallo Oromo was what he called the "patriarchal state" under chiefly families.⁴⁸ Only in the case of Warra Himano do we clearly find another basis of self-identification: Islam. The claim made by the ancestors of the founders of that dynasty to have been descended from a celebrated local saint, and through him, from the Prophet's family; their adoption of the title of *imām*; and their commitment to the expansion of Islam, clearly show a higher degree of ideological-political sophistication than that attained by the other chiefdoms. Hence, it can be argued that only the Warra Himano dynasty represents a hereditary principality which consistently employed Islam, rather than ethnic identity, as an ideology of political legitimacy and territorial expansion. The ruling class also initiated a process of regional integration which, however, was not completed, due to the revival of the central monarchy that led to the further disintegration of Wallo as a regional and dynastic power base.

In the 1840s Wallo proper, that is, the area south of the headwaters of the Bashlo and Mille rivers, was made up of quite distinct provincial units, although all were under the nominal control of *Rās 'Alī II* ruling from Dabra Tābor/Gondar. This is attested in the various European travellers' accounts. The most important of the various political units which constituted Wallo was the *imāmate* of Warra Himano, with its centre at Tantā. Qāllu in eastern Wallo was under Berru Lubo who ruled from Ayn Ambā and Gof. Laga Gorā was governed by *Abbā Dūgat* Adarā Billē from his centre at Gāttirā and Dāyar. Tahuladarē was ruled by Amadē *Abbā Shāwūl*, Boranā by *Abbā Dāmtawé*; Laga Ambo by Amadē and Dāwūd Berellē; and Laga Hidā by Hasan Dullo. Warra Bābbo and Ambāssal were the domains of 'Alī Adam and 'Alī Berru respectively.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Zergaw, op. cit., p. 24.

⁴⁶ Harris, op. cit., II, p. 356.

⁴⁷ Chapter I, pp. 16ff.

⁴⁸ D'Abbadie, *Douce ans*, II, p. 201.

⁴⁹ Isenberg and Krapf, *Journals*, pp. 39–42ff.; Théophile LeFebvre, *Voyage en Abyssinie exécuté pendant les années 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842, 1843* (Paris, 1845–54), 6 vols., II, pp. 171–85; Ferret and Galinier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, II, p. 329.

While Liban of Warra Himano, Adarā of Laga Gorā and Berru of Qāllu were in a position to assist Rās 'Alī militarily, since they were his nominal vassals,⁵⁰ the rest fought amongst themselves over the acquisition of territory and tribute, or as a consequence of external interference.⁵¹ Adara and Berru maintained friendly relations with each other. According to Krapf, Berru gave his daughter, Fātima, in marriage to Adarā for political reasons: to prevent Adarā from allying himself with Shawā.⁵² On the other hand, one of the Tahuladare chiefs, 'Alī Māreyye, and *Imām* Fāris of Garfā, were both at war with Qāllu, Laga Gorā and Warra Himano.⁵³ So were Warra Babbo and Ambāssal.⁵⁴

Whatever the degree of political fragmentation which prevailed in Wallo in the first half of the nineteenth century, and in spite of the intensity of the rivalry amongst some of the hereditary rulers and the attempts of the Warra Himano princes to bring the different units under their sway, contemporary travellers were struck by three aspects of the situation in Wallo at the time: the prominent position of Islam in chiefly courts and the degree of the religious zeal and commitment of the Muslim rulers; the importance of caravan trade, especially in the southeastern part of the region; and the cavalry strength of these chiefdoms.

Arnauld d'Abbadie's remark that "the most active centre of Muslim propaganda in East Africa is today among the Oromo of Wallo"⁵⁵ may not be an excessively bold assertion since he is noted for his caution and sober views, and even if his observation was exaggerated in this case, it reflected the strong position of Islam in Wallo in the first half of the nineteenth century. He also noted the prevalence, at the popular level, of certain practices which were divergent from orthodox Islam: the drinking of wine and the offering of expi-

atory sacrifices, which involved the slaughter of animals and the sprinkling of the blood by those taking part in the ritual.⁵⁶ Behind Krapf's stereotypical description of the Wallo Muslims as "fanatic and bigoted Mahomedans",⁵⁷ we can perceive the revival and active propagation of Islam which had been stimulated by the expanding influence of the mystical orders. Arnauld connected the "conversion of the Wallo Oromo" to the arrival of *'ulamā'* from Harar.⁵⁸ But, as we have seen earlier, this had to do only with the introduction of the Qādiriyya order.

Krapf also noted the importance of a special ritual or mode of collective worship which he observed in Wallo: *wadīja*,⁵⁹ a religious gathering held occasionally at which a small group of clerics noted for their piety make invocations to God and the local saints on behalf of a person in distress or of the community as a whole, seeking recovery from physical or mental affliction, or general material and spiritual well-being.

The French travellers, Combes and Tamisier, wrote in 1835-37 about the role of the *'ulamā'* in the religious life of the Muslim communities of Wallo and about the prevalence of saint veneration. They also noted two important features of contemporary Islam in Wallo: first, the presence, in the courts of the Muslim chiefs, of religious functionaries who advised them on matters pertaining to faith and served as judges; and second, the laxity shown by the ordinary people towards the observance of the prescribed religious obligations which was compensated by seeking the blessings of pious clerics.⁶⁰ This is a very perceptive and fair assessment of the religious situation since it portrays the nature of popular Islam, the role of the *'ulamā'* and their relationship with the secular authorities, to which we shall return later in the present chapter.

Towards the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century, the English traveller, Salt, observed that the high level of cultural development among the Warra Himano Muslims was a consequence of the impact of Islam.⁶¹

⁵⁰ Ferret and Gallinier, loc. cit.

⁵¹ Arnauld d'Abbadie suggested that the internal dissension among the ruling houses of Wallo was due to the deliberate policy of the lords of Bagēnder and the princes of Shawā to secure local allies amenable to the expansion of their spheres of influence: *Douze ans*, II, p. 200. For the relevance of this kind of policy in the crucial period following Tewodros's death, see Chapter VI, pp. 168-169.

⁵² Isenberg and Krapf, op. cit., pp. 327-28.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 107, 398, 400; Harris, op. cit., II, p. 355.

⁵⁴ Informant: *Shaykh* 'Alī.

⁵⁵ D'Abbadie, loc. cit. See also PRO, FO 1/8, f. 226; Enclosure to Pellowd's letter of 9 July 1854 in which Warra Himano and Qāllu are described as "the strong-hold of Islamism".

⁵⁶ D'Abbadie, loc. cit.

⁵⁷ Isenberg and Krapf, op. cit., p. 323.

⁵⁸ D'Abbadie, loc. cit.

⁵⁹ Isenberg and Krapf, op. cit., pp. 370-71. See also Krapf, *Travels*, p. 83; Le Febvre, *Rai Galla . . .*, p. 15, n. 50.

⁶⁰ Combes and Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, II, pp. 300-01.

⁶¹ Salt, *A Voyage to Abyssinia*, p. 300.

Hence by the beginning of the first half of the nineteenth century, Islam in Wallo had become a distinctive feature of the religious, political and cultural life of a significant section of the entire population. As Rubenson remarked: "the common bond here [amongst the Wallo and Yaju] was Islam, rather than ethnic or linguistic conformity."⁶²

Therefore, despite the continuing political fragmentation of Wallo and the petty rivalries amongst its princes, Islam seems to have flourished and become well consolidated. It owed this steady progress to three factors: firstly, the consistent policy of the rulers of Warra Himano and, to a lesser extent, those of the other chiefdoms, to strengthen and expand Islam beyond the immediate frontier of their spheres of influence; secondly, the presence of active and fervent *ūlamā*⁶³ who were either attached to the courts or mostly operated from religious establishments or centres of Islamic learning, and who preserved a long tradition of the perpetual renewal and propagation of Islam; and, thirdly, the decline of the Gondarine state and the intensification of the struggle for power amongst the nobility of the northern and central provinces, which provided an opportunity for the expansion of Islam under the patronage of the Wallo and Yaju dynasts. Thus, contrary to a recent assertion, the fragmentation of Wallo did not arrest or slow down the process of Islamization,⁶⁴ but seems to have accelerated it. It was only with the revival of imperial authority under Tewodros and his successors that the predominant position of Islam was challenged and gradually undermined, not because of the slackening in the commitment of the Muslim rulers of Wallo, or because of the decline in the religious fervour of the clerics, but because of the specific policies pursued by the Christian emperors to contain Islam which they perceived as a focus of regional challenge and an ideology of resistance to political centralization and reunification. Thus what delayed the process of the integration of Wallo into the reconstituted empire of mid-nineteenth-century Ethiopia was not the apparent recalcitrance of the Wallo Muslim lords and their unwillingness to submit, but the declared policy of the centralizing monarchs to break the political power of the Wallo Muslim princes and, simultaneously, to neutralize, weaken or even eliminate Islam altogether, as well as the severity and ruthlessness with which they attempted to implement that policy.

A recent writer has suggested that the following features were characteristic of the Oromo of Wallo: firstly, their Islamization preceded the establishment of dynasties; secondly, the control of trade and markets was not decisive for the formation of dynasties in the region; and thirdly, the communities were dependent upon a peasant economy.⁶⁵ But the first of these features applies only to the Māmmadoch rulers because of their tradition which claims descent from *Shaykh* Nūr Husayn, thus making them already Muslim when they first settled in Garfā. Therefore, their exposure to Islamic influences might have indeed predated the establishment of their dynasty. However, there were other Oromo groups who had been long settled in the region before 1700 and who had already adopted Islam from the indigenous Amharic-speaking populations. It would be difficult to assert that these groups had no form of political organization in the period between their earliest settlement in the region and their subsequent adoption of Islam.

As for the role of trade, reference has already been made to the tradition of the early founders of the Māmmadoch as a trading family before they established their political dominance over Warra Himano.⁶⁶ European travellers made very revealing observations on the existence of lively markets and trade-routes, especially in south-eastern Wallo. Krapf mentioned the existence of a number of major markets in Qāllu and west of it: Totolā, Anchārro, Reqqē, "Dawc", Kalo and Fallanā.⁶⁷ He also wrote that in the Qāllu markets, the caravans going to Awsā and Tajura assembled,⁶⁸ and that the temporary ruler of Qāllu, Berru Lubo, actively encouraged trade.⁶⁹ Krapf also noted that trade had tempered the hostile character of the eastern Oromo whom he described as well-disposed towards strangers.⁷⁰ The markets in Dawway, Rcqqē and Anchārro were also mentioned by Lefebvre.⁷¹

Hence trade might not have been decisive for state formation amongst the highland Wallo Oromo groups because of the unstable

⁶² Mohammed Hassen, "The Oromo of Ethiopia," pp. 378-79; idem, *The Oromo of Ethiopia*, p. 88.

⁶³ See above, p. 121.

⁶⁴ Isenberg and Krapf, op. cit., p. 391.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 40, 362.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 365.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 397.

⁶⁸ Lefebvre, op. cit., II, pp. 107, 129, 137. For more on this, see the next chapter.

⁶⁹ Rubenson, "Ethiopia and the Horn," p. 55.

⁷⁰ Fekadu, op. cit., p. 9.

and violent circumstances which attended their arrival and settlement in an Amharic-speaking region, and because of the disturbed political conditions which prevailed from the middle of the eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century.⁷¹ But trade did play a crucial role in the development of the chiefdoms in southeastern Wallo, especially Qāllu, because the area was contiguous to the trade-routes going through Awsā to Tājura.⁷² There was also the important trade-route which ran through the territories ruled by the eastern Wallo Muslim princes. That is why, beginning from the first up to the third decade of the nineteenth century, the Shawāñ princes launched periodic campaigns against Qāllu and southeastern Wallo.⁷³ Hence, the available evidence does not allow one to make a broad generalization about the part which trade played in the formation of dynasties in the whole region unless a distinction is made between eastern and western highland Wallo.

Likewise, the notion of the prevalence of a peasant economy is applicable only to western Wallo whereas in the east, trade in salt and slaves as well as in grain and livestock, was an important source of revenue for the rulers and a major occupation of a significant section of the population.

The Cavalry in Highland Wallo

The available evidence on this subject strongly suggests that the different chiefdoms of highland Wallo, including that of Warra Himano, can be thought of as petty cavalry states. This is because of the role of the horse not only in their rise to prominence, but also in their expansion and in maintaining their semi-independence in the face of attempts by the Yajju lords and the Gondarine kings to subjugate and incorporate them.⁷⁴ Several writers have made observations confirming this view. Firstly, the topography of the land and the availability of pasture afforded ideal conditions for horse-breeding.

Arnauld d'Abbadie described Gojām, Shawāñ and Wallo as "... les provinces où les chevaux abondent le plus."⁷⁵ Angot was long known as a land of horses.⁷⁶

Commenting on the strength of the Warra Himano cavalry, Arnauld d'Abbadie wrote that it was noted for its "solidarité devant l'ennemi,"⁷⁷ and aptly summarized the main features of highland Wallo economy: horsebreeding, cattle-rearing and warfare, while the cultivation of the land was left to the original inhabitants by the first Oromo settlers who had reduced them to the status of tribute-paying subjects.⁷⁸

The Oromo adopted the use of the horse towards the end of the sixteenth century and this facilitated their mobility and added speed to their skill in surprise attacks on the enemy.⁷⁹ The main basis of the military strength of the Yajju warlords was their own cavalry and that of the northern Wallo.⁸⁰

Not only in the emergence of the Wallo chiefdoms did superiority in cavalry play a decisive role but also in the broader regional power struggles amongst the princes of northern and central Ethiopia. Caulk argued that the prominence of the central provinces of Ethiopia, under Rās 'Alī, revived in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries largely because of the cavalry of the Yajju and Wallo rulers.⁸¹

Hence the possession of a strong striking force of cavalry was an indispensable factor for the consolidation of a local power base and the success of campaigns of territorial expansion. From the early period of settlement of the Oromo in highland Wallo until the middle of the nineteenth century, when firearms began to alter the balance of provincial power, the horse had played two major roles:

⁷⁵ D'Abbadie, op. cit., II, p. 111.

⁷⁶ Richard Pankhurst, *An Introduction to the Economic History of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1961), p. 215; Ahmad [ib. Ṣiddiq] b. 'Alī Maṣeyyē of Warra Himano [grandson of Rās Maṣeyyē Gugṣā, ruler of Bagender (1828–[83?]) to 'Alā' al-Dīn [governor of Massawa], 22 Oct. 1870] in Sven Rubenson (ed.), *Internal Rivalries and Foreign Threats 1869–1879 (Acta Aethiopica III)* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press and New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers/Rutgers University Press, 2000), p. 71.

Ahmad wrote: "We have a lot of horses and men..."

D'Abbadie, op. cit., p. 70; see also PRO, FO 1/8, f. 314.

D'Abbadie, op. cit., p. 110.

Idem, "A Reappraisal of the Impact of Firearms in the History of Warfare in

Ethiopia (c. 1500–1800)," *JES*, XIV (1976–79), pp. 120–21.

R.A. Cauk, "Firearms and Princely Power in Ethiopia in the Nineteenth Century," *JAH*, XIII, 4 (1972), p. 609.

⁷¹ Asnake, "A Historical Survey," p. 267; however, he has overstretched the period (from the 17th to the last decade of the 19th century), during which "trade became a negligible activity among the Wallo".

⁷² See next chapter.

⁷³ Alip, "Trade and Politics," pp. 359, 362–63; idem, *Era of the Princes*, pp. 150–51.

⁷⁴ C. Mondion-Vidalhet (trans.ed.), *Chronique de Théodoros II Roi des Rôis d'Ethiopie 1853–1868* (Paris, 1905), p. 7 (text); Harris reported that in 1840 Rās 'Alī was defeated by the Wallo cavalry at a place called Qurqurā while on an expedition to Hāt: op. cit., II, p. 355.

traditional and prestigious, hence the "horse-names" by which the Wallo rulers of the nineteenth century were also known, and political-military, since cavalry power helped in the creation of territorial enclaves and protecting them against threats or attempts at invasion from neighbouring and far-off enemies.

Muslim Clerics and Potentates

Having outlined the origin and development of the political entities which constituted eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Muslim Wallo, it is now proper to review and describe the nature of the relationship between the Muslim chiefs and clerics in order to see more closely the degree to which Islam was used as a basis for political organization, cultural identity, and even as a justification for territorial expansion and for resisting imperial encroachments. Such a perspective will enable us to assess the role and extent of the influence of the 'ulama' in chiefly courts.

Oral traditions generally emphasize the fact that the Muslim chiefs of Wallo showed considerable respect and reverence for well-established and locally-renowned Muslim clerics, whereas the latter tended to avoid having any direct dealings with the former.⁸² Some of the militant 'ulama' did not even seek *waqf*-land from the local hereditary chiefs whom they more often than not considered as "bad", Muslims who had transgressed from the divine law by indulging in, and tolerating, wine-drinking and other reprehensible offences. For instance, it is related that the Qällu potentate, Berru Lubo, once prepared a feast in commemoration of the Prophet's birthday to which he invited the 'ulama' of Qällu including *al-Hājj* Bushrā and *al-Hājj* Muhammad Yāsin. At night anecdotes from the Prophetic Traditions were narrated in order to enlighten the political dignitaries and the people who had assembled for the occasion. *Al-Hājj* Muhammad Yāsin was called upon to translate into Amharic a section from the Tradition which stated that children born from wine-drinking fathers were illegitimate and the marriage contracted between their parents was illegal. The chiefs, who thought that the statement was an indirect reference to them, felt so offended that in the morning, Berru called a meeting of his subordinate chiefs and informed

them that he was considering the expulsion of the *shaykh* who had the audacity to humiliate them publicly. So *al-Hājj* Muhammad Yāsin was exiled to Chaffa on the pretext that he was to be granted land there.⁸³ The 'ulama' had therefore no power of enforcing conformity to Islamic law, although they continued to instruct and exhort the people at funerals and other major public gatherings to observe the precepts of Islam and to refrain from acts that might compromise their faith.

The 'ulama' also condemned certain customs such as the *wayyānē* ritual feuds, which were periodic inter-ethnic or individual conflicts primarily intended to test courage and improve fighting skills.⁸⁴ In southeastern Wallo, such fighting used to take place between the warriors of Qällu and Tabuladaré at Mutti Qolo on the outskirts of the present-day town of Kombolchā and by the *Challaqā* River. The 'ulama' of the time tried to abolish these practices by threatening not to perform funeral prayers for those who died while fighting. However, the local authorities did not give them the support they needed to stamp out these customs, and it was only in the time of *Rās Mīkā'el* in the late nineteenth century that the *wayyānē* was prohibited by law.⁸⁵ An informant narrated an anecdote about the *wayyānē*. While *Shaykh Sayyid* Muhammad b. *Faqīh* Zubayr, a disciple of *Shaykh* Muhammad Shāfi, was travelling to the land of the Rāyyā Oromo in about A.H. 1230/1814 A.D., he camped near Qobbo where he witnessed a *wayyānē* feud in progress between the lowland and highland inhabitants in which the captives were emasculated. The *shaykh*, greatly saddened by the ferocity and barbarity of the fighting, offered prayers, together with a local saint, asking for God's assistance in his plan to abolish the practice. Persuaded by the saint to stay on and arrange a reconciliation between the feuding factions, the *shaykh* had them take an oath not to take part in such a fratricidal war in the future. Although there was a temporary lull as a result of his initiative, the fighting resumed not long after his departure, and led to the loss of many lives.⁸⁶

⁸² Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn.

⁸³ The *wayyānē* feud amongst the Yajju is briefly discussed in PRO, FO 1/8, f. 294v-250. On a variant of the *wayyānē*, called *wājirūlī*, see Asnake, "A Historical Survey," pp. 263-264. Also Fekadu Begna, "Land and Peasantry in Northern Wallo, 1941-1974, Yejju and Rāyyā Qobbo *Awrajjis*" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Department

⁸⁴ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn.

There were some Wallo chiefs who were so favourable towards Islam that they readily and whole-heartedly assisted the *'ulamā'* with campaigns for the expansion of Islam. A good example was *Imām* Yūsuf, the hereditary governor of Garfa, who provided men and arms for *Shaykh* Muhammad Shāfi'.⁸⁷ *Imām* Muhammad 'Alī of Warra Himano, as we saw in an earlier chapter, had at his court many Muslim scholars and religious functionaries. Likewise, the Dawway scholar, *Muftī* Dāwūd, was in charge of legal administration at the court of Berru Lubo who is believed to have sought his advice on religious matters.⁸⁸

The most detailed and perceptive analysis of the relationship between the *'ulamā'* and the secular authorities of Wallo was made by one of our informants. According to him, if a well-known *ālim* had a reputation for sanctity and high moral standards, or if he was from the same locality as the chief, or was related to him by birth or through marriage, then the chief usually sought his friendship because the *shaykhī*'s presence in his domain was considered a source of prestige. In many cases it was because the *shaykhī*'s reputation indirectly enhanced the chief's position as a patron of pious clerics, rather than because of the chief's own personal sincere devotion (*ikhlāq*) to Islam *per se*, that he held the *shaykhī* in high esteem.

Some of the powerful chiefs who ruled over extensive areas were very selective in their patronage of the local Muslim scholars or saints. Such were Berru Lubo of Qāllu and Adarā Bille of Laga Gorā who sought the friendship of those clerics whose influence was commensurate with their own political power. Sometimes clerics like *Shaykh* Ja'far Bukko had bitter conflicts with the secular leaders such as Adarā and the other lesser chiefs over the latter's alleged disregard for the Islamic code of behaviour, their disrespect for the *'ulamā'*, and their indifference to social malpractices. For instance, the practice of confiscating the property of individuals who were unable to fulfil their obligations towards the local officials, such as failure to provide free labour or default in the payment of tribute on land, were issues on which some of the *'ulamā'* focussed their opposition. Occasionally they were imprisoned by the chiefs, but were soon released after a formal plea for clemency had been made on their behalf by other senior members of the local community.⁸⁹

Our informant summarized the complex nature of the relationship between Muslim rulers and clerics by identifying three groups of *'ulamā'* who were distinguished from each other by the degree of intimacy in their relationship with the authorities. Firstly, there were a few scholars who had no dealings whatsoever with the chiefs, even when they lived close to the residence of the chiefs. This was due to either the clerics' upbringing or the intensity of their religious devotion which left them with little, if any, time for any form of interaction at a political level. An example of this was the *shaykhī* of Shonkē in southeastern Wallo, Jawhar b. Haydar (d. 1935). Secondly, there were some clerics who had very intimate relationships with those in power, but to whom they did not show the deference or outward subservience which the position of the rulers demanded of them. Such was the case of *Shaykhī* Sayyid Ibrāhīm (d. A.H. 1376/1956 A.D.) of Chalē in Warra Babbō. Thirdly, there were some clerics who were vehemently opposed to the chiefs on grounds of principle since they regarded them as only nominal Muslims and transgressors of Islamic law. *Shaykhī* Ja'far Bukko's relationship with Adarā is a case in point.⁹⁰

Concluding Remarks

The present chapter reviewed the background to, and the elements involved in, the emergence, development and expansion of provincially-based hereditary chieftains in historical Wallo beginning from the turn of the eighteenth up to the middle of the nineteenth century, with particular emphasis on the principality of Warra Himano. It stressed the fact that through an effective dynastic marriage and political alliance with the indigenous aristocratic families, the building up of a local power base, and the use of Islam as a source of legitimacy, and through sheer military might based on a formidable cavalry force, the Māmmadoch princes were able to establish their power in Warra Himano and to gradually extend their sphere of influence over a large territory to the north and south of the Bashlo River. Islam played a crucial role in this development beyond its traditional one of being a source of internal cultural identity: it also served as a factor for legitimizing political power, and as an ideology for expansion and for mobilizing human and material resources, in order to resist

⁸⁷ Idem. See also Chapter III, p. 96.

⁸⁸ Idem.

⁸⁹ Informant: *Shaykhī* Muhammad Walē.

territorial encroachments emanating from the northern nominal suzerains of the Wallo dynasts: the Gondarine and Yajju warlords. In return, some of the most outstanding *imāms* of Warra Himano enhanced the position of Islam and attempted to speed up the process of its diffusion beyond the territorial confines of their domains. The career of *Shaykh Muhammad Shāfi*, discussed in the preceding chapter, illustrates how a religious authority responded to the appeal made by a secular leader to defend his realm in the name of Islam. This represented one of the few exceptional cases of a relationship between clerics and chiefs characterized by a close inter-dependence between two sources of allegiance: Islam and hereditary political power. However, the relationship was much more complex than a temporary convergence of interests of religious and political notables.

The next chapter will attempt to look more deeply into another form of relationship forged between Muslim traders, chiefs and clerics through a discussion of nineteenth-century trade and society with particular reference to southeastern Wallo.

CHAPTER FIVE

TRADE IN SOUTHEASTERN WALLO (ca. 1800-1890)

In the chapters on Islamization and *Sufi* revival, it was pointed out that the eastern and southeastern regions of Ethiopia which were directly facing the hinterlands of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden coasts were important channels through which new ideas and trade goods passed to the interior of the Ethiopian highlands. This chapter is specifically concerned with the southeastern part of Wallo, which was commercially the most important, even crucial, part of the entire region in the nineteenth century. The revival of the Red Sea trade in the early decades of that century, itself a consequence of the rise of expansionist Egypt and the relative safety of the region for merchants and pilgrims, directly contributed to the increasing demand for Ethiopian goods—spices, musk, ivory, gold and slaves—and the opening up of new trade routes which connected the coast with the hinterland.¹ The emergence of the port of Täjura, to which reference has already been made, was both a by-product of, and a contributing factor to, the increase in the volume of the domestic transit trade through southeastern Wallo.

In order to understand the links between trade, authority and Islam in the region, it is necessary to reconstruct the patterns, organization and extent of the internal and long-distance commerce in its southeastern areas, with particular emphasis on the development of trading communities and centres in Qällu and Dawway.

The notion that the migration and settlement of the Oromo in highland Wallo, beginning from the late sixteenth century, completely disrupted commerce for a considerable length of time,² should be dismissed. It is part of the long-established stereotype that the Oromo were the "scourge" of settled life and culture.³ Recent studies have shown that some of the Oromo chiefs of Wallo encouraged trade even before its great revival in the late eighteenth and nineteenth

¹ See Chapter III, p. 73.

See Chapter III, P. 73.

³ Almeida as quoted in Pankhurst, *Introduction to Economic History*, p. 79; Trinham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 106; Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians*, p. 76.

centuries. Although initially the Oromo raids disrupted the trade between northern and central Ethiopia, on the one hand, and the southern regions, on the other, once their incursions had lost momentum, commercial contacts were restored in the succeeding generations.⁴

Although there are still strong and persistent traditions about the coming to Wallo of trading families from Bagēmder and Tegrāy, apparently to revive the trade of the region⁵ in the late eighteenth century, during the reign of Amadē Kolāsē of Warra Himano, and again in the time of Emperor Yohannes IV in the late 1870s, as well as about their settlement in Adas in Warra Himano and in Qällū,⁶ it is most unlikely that there was virtually no trade worthy of consideration before that period.

In eastern Wallo, extending from the northeast frontier with Tegrāy in the north to Ambāssal in the south, a number of important markets had flourished since the early mediaeval period, which suggests the existence of an extensive network of local markets and long-distance caravan routes branching off in many directions, and probably of prosperous trading families.

Travellers and chroniclers such as Alvares, Shihāb al-Dīn and Almeida mentioned in their accounts, written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the existence of lively trading centres such as Mandeley in southeastern Tegrāy, Qorqorā in Angot,⁷ and Wāsal.⁸ However, they seem to have gradually declined and completely collapsed as a result of the events of the sixteenth century: the wars between the Christian kingdom and the Muslim state of Adāl, and the Oromo raids. Hence, it was not until the late eighteenth century that this region became prominent in the overall trade of the country, a development closely associated with the emergence of several small relay stations and markets which nineteenth-century European travellers often mentioned. In the period under consideration, the commercial importance of the northern sector of eastern Wallo lay in its role as a transit zone for the trade between Tegrāy, central

⁴ Parkhurst, op. cit., pp. 314–15.
⁵ Asnake, op. cit., pp. 267, 270, 271; informants: *Sayyids* Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn and Abd al-Salam.

⁶ Informant: *Sayyid* Abd al-Salām.
⁷ Francesco Alvaro, *The Pester John of the Indies* C.F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford (trans./ed.) (London, 1954), 2 vols., I, p. 187; Almeida in *Some Records of Ethiopia*, pp. 110–11.
⁸ Shihāb al-Dīn in Bassett, *Histoire de la Conquête*, pp. 283ff.; Merid, "Political Geography," p. 622.

Wallo and Shawā, rather than as a meeting-point of major trade-routes leading to the coast. However, owing to the political and cultural orientation of the Yaju dynasts towards the north and northwest, and the conflicts among the provincial warlords, the volume of trade remained small and long-distance trade could not develop. Moreover, the general geographical position of the area was not conducive to the development of such trade across the desert to the coast.

In the southern half of eastern Wallo, the situation was markedly different. Although there is no extant evidence on the development of long-distance trade before the late eighteenth century, it is well-attested that several factors contributed to the development and expansion of trade in this sector during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This is evident from the accounts of European travellers of the late 1830s and early 1840s. Important among such factors were, firstly, the strategic position of the region, since it directly faced the hinterland adjacent to the port of Tājura, and secondly, the rise to power of the Qällū rulers who were the patrons of commerce⁹ and exercised effective control over the districts where the trade-routes converged. The district of Dawway was an important terminus of the slave trade and of the caravans coming from the north, as well as from Awsā and Tājura.¹⁰

The emergence of the Sultanate of Awsā in the eighteenth century was also an important stimulus for the development of trade.¹¹ The relative fertility of the valley of Awsā, the security which prevailed under the sultans, and the existence of the salt deposits of Lake Assal encouraged trade: "Aussa, having trade connections with the Wallo country, Argoba [Qällū and Dawway], Gondar and even Massawa, probably benefited from this new development . . ."¹² Furthermore, ". . . with the opening of a direct route [from Tājura] to Sho'a, the Tājurans left the Zeila route but they still used the route through Aussa in order to reach Dawe, in the independent part of Argoba, which was under a Muslim ruler."¹³

Although the frictions between the Shawān and Wallo rulers since the early nineteenth century appear to have been politically-motivated,¹⁴ the main underlying factor was the desire to control, and

⁹ Isenberg and Krapf, *Journals*, p. 365.

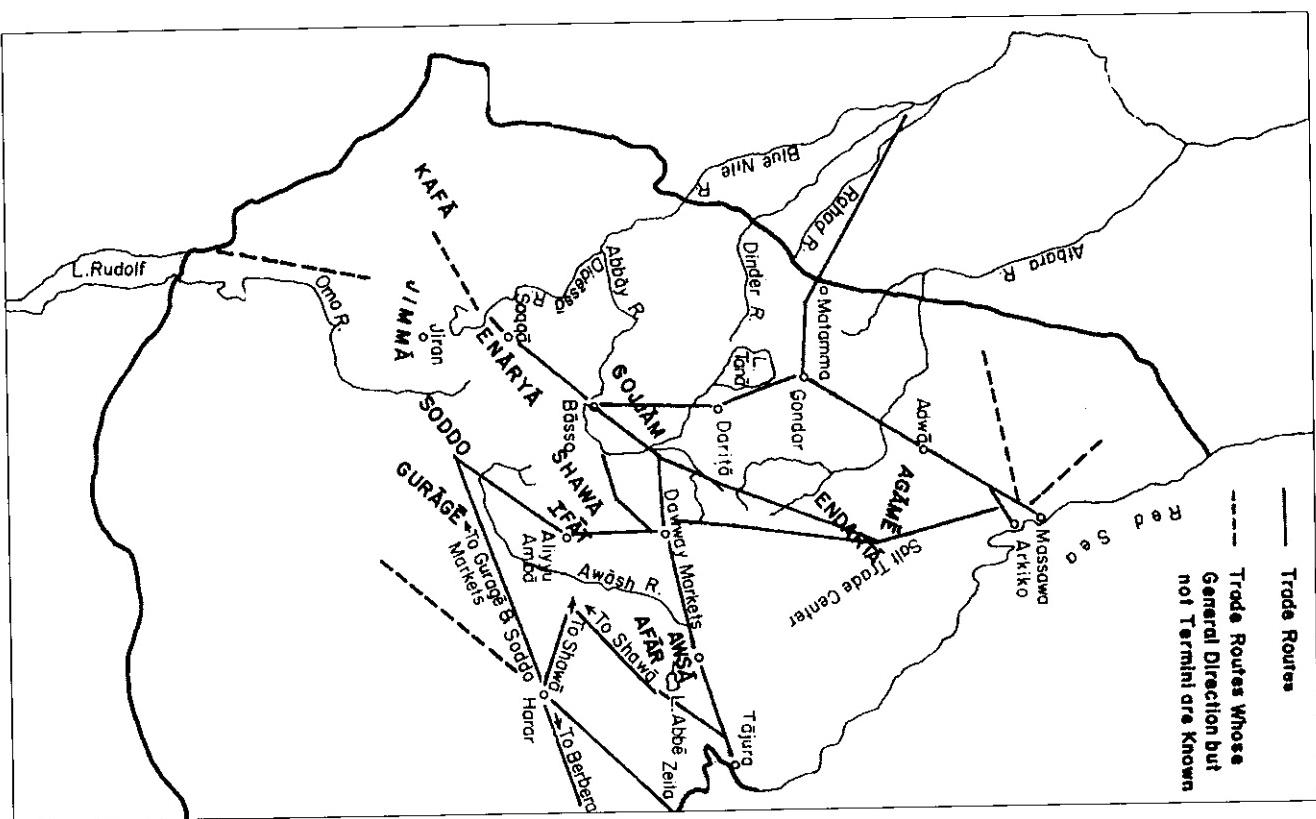
¹⁰ Abir, *Era of the Princes*, p. 60.

¹¹ Ibid., "Trade and Politics," pp. 165–66.

¹² Ibid., p. 170.

¹³ Ibid., p. 197.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 359–60, 362–63.



The Dawway Trading Emporium

Contrary to the views of most writers who have discussed the trade of southeastern Wallo either as part of the overall trade of Shawā, or of Wallo, Dawway is neither a town¹⁵ nor a single market or trading station.¹⁶ It is in fact a name of a district in southeastern Wallo consisting of a number of commercial centres, residences of merchant families and customs posts, as well as of centres of Islamic learning such as Gaddo, Doddotā and Birrinsā Qore.

Dawway (the Dawe of most writers) is bounded by the Awāsh River in the east, Reqqē in the west, Garfā in the north and the Borkannā River in the south.¹⁸ The name is derived from a river of the same name which rises in the neighbourhood of Kamisē and flows into the Awāsh, although during the hot season it dries up on reaching Artumna, east of Chaffā Robi.¹⁹

Dawway is therefore a collective name of an agglomeration of local markets and caravan trading centres, and the termini of several routes coming from central Wallo, southern Tegrāy and northeastern Shawā, and those from the coast.²⁰

Dawway and the surrounding districts form a transitional zone between the arid wastes of the southern Afar territory in the east and the cool highlands of Reqqē in the west. It is thus ideal for the cultivation of high-altitude crops, and of cotton, coffee, pepper, tobacco and fruits on its lower fringes. These, together with hides and skins, were important items of trade exchanged for the products of the lowlands. Agriculture is supplemented by animal husbandry.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 363.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 51, 62. Paradoxically, he criticized earlier writers for considering Awāsh as a town, although it is a name of a region. "Trade and Politics," pp. 170–71.

¹⁷ Asnake, op. cit., p. 271.

¹⁸ Informant: *al-Hāfi* Muhammad al-Tayyib (Addis Ababa, 3 July 1983); Stiz,

"The Western Argobba of Yifat," p. 186 (map).

¹⁹ Informant cited *supra*.

²⁰ Isenberg and Krapf, *Journals*, p. 40.

ensure the safety of, the trade-routes between Shawā, Gondar and Tegrāy through the Wallo territory.¹⁵ Hence, a combination of strategic, political and economic factors turned southeastern Wallo into a commercially crucial area possessing direct access to the coast.

Map 2 Principal Trade Routes in Nineteenth-Century Ethiopia
(Based on Abir, *Era of the Princes*, p. 45)

Further east nomadic pastoralism has been the dominant mode of subsistence.

The ethnic composition of the inhabitants shows a remarkable degree of diversity. The Oromo have been long established in the region since the seventeenth century and constituted a conspicuous and distinct ethnic entity; hence one often hears of the Dawway Oromo. The present linguistic frontier is the market of Bora beyond this frontier, before the Amharicization of this part of Wallo, was much closer to the present-day town of Kamisē. Another, and even earlier, group is the Argobba-speaking community which has been predominant in Shonké, Argobba (eastern Wallo) and Anchārro,²¹ since early mediaeval times. To these older groups were later added Amharic-speaking merchant families from highland Wallo and the Gondar area who arrived during the early decades of the nineteenth century, and were later to intermarry with both the Oromo and Argobba, and even with the Afar clans, thereby contributing to the ethnic heterogeneity of Dawway.

As far as religious affiliation is concerned, Islam has been the dominant faith of the Argobba-speaking population of the region since at least the eleventh century,²² although with the settlement of the Oromo, elements of their traditional faith were introduced, and the attempts made by the nineteenth-century Sufi scholars of the area to regenerate Islam were also directed, as we saw earlier, towards extirpating these features from Islam. Such practices as worshipping under trees and offering of sacrifices near rivers had been strong elements of pre-Islamic and Oromo traditional beliefs. According to an informant, it was the ordinary people, especially the cultivators, who were the first to embrace Islam, while the early Oromo local chiefs and notables long resisted conversion. The principal mode of Islamization was through the conversion of a group from within a clan, with other clans following suit. Later on, however, it was the Oromo *'ulama'* of Dawway who were responsible for the thorough Islamization of some of the neighbouring Afar nomadic groups of the lowlands.²³

²¹ Informant: *Shaykh* Yāsīn Muhammad (Kombolchā, 4 April 1983).

²² Stitz, op. cit., p. 190.

²³ This is based on local oral traditions of Islamization of the Muslim communities and on the date suggested for the founding of the 'Sultanate of Shawā'; see Chapter II, p. 60.

²⁴ Informant: *al-Hāfi* Muhammad al-Tayyib.

In the time of *Muftī* Dāwūd (d. 1818/19), the Sharī'a was firmly established when marriage contracts, and the regulations governing inheritance and divorce, began to be strictly applied according to Islamic law. The *wayyānē* inter-clan feuds between the Oromo, and the Argobba- and Amharic-speaking inhabitants, and frequent plundering, frontier skirmishes and kidnapping, were also brought to an end.²⁵ The dominant school of Islamic law is still the Shāfi'iyya, although the Hanafi *madhhab* was introduced to Madinē by *al-Hāfi* 'Abd al-Latīf, a native of Dawway, from Darrā in northwest Shawā, in the first decade of the twentieth century.²⁶

The strategic location of Dawway facilitated the growth of markets and the opening of trade routes in the late eighteenth century, and this was intimately linked with the rise of the port of Tājura, and the emergence of the Kingdom of Shawā and the Sultanate of Awsā. As Abir rightly observed, during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the only point of access for travellers from the coast to the highlands, apart from Massawa, was Tājura.²⁷ The route to Awsā, and through Dawway to central Wallo, was older than the new route from Tājura to Ifāt in Shawā.²⁸ A glance at the map²⁹ also reveals that the distance between Tājura and Dawway was shorter than that between Tājura and Shawā.³⁰ Thus the geographical proximity of Dawway to the coast was of crucial importance for the development and expansion of the caravan trade, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that Dawway was a vital link in the external trade between the coast and the central Ethiopian highlands in the period under discussion.

Abir has suggested four important factors for the emergence of Tājura and the revival of commerce in the nineteenth century. Among these were, firstly, the expansion of the Red Sea trade after the establishment of Egypt's power in the Hijaz and the increase in the demand for slaves from Ethiopia; secondly, the rise and expansion of the Kingdom of Shawā; thirdly, the decline of the Zeila-Harar-Shawā route; and fourthly, the opening of a new route to Shawā through the salt-producing Afar territory.³¹ If the rise of Shawā can

²⁵ Idem.

²⁶ Idem and *Shaykh* Yāsīn.

²⁷ Abir, *Era of the Princes*, p. 20.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

²⁹ See map 2, p. 142.

³⁰ However, Abir, op. cit., p. 22, thinks the latter route is more direct.

³¹ Idem, "Trade and Politics," p. 180.

be regarded as a contributory factor, so can the rise and development of the principality of Qāllu in eastern Wallo, which had a more direct access to Awsā and Tajura than did Shawā. Without the patronage and active support of the Qāllu rulers and their vasals in Rcqqē and Dawway, the volume of trade would have been severely limited.

Hence, the early communities of Dawway and its neighbouring districts developed the capacity for economic growth, and for sustaining an exchange economy and a hereditary ruling chieftainship, owing to the diversity of its economic resources: grain, cattle and cotton which were needed by the nomadic inhabitants of the lowlands, and the tribute on land and trade. To these internal factors which favoured potential economic prosperity and the emergence of a ruling aristocracy was added the stimulus which external trade gave to surplus production, the accumulation of capital and the rise of indigenous trading families. However, owing probably to lack of not only sufficient capital to undertake long-distance trading transactions, but also of limited patronage by the local chiefs and of enterprise and business acumen, these merchant families failed to exploit the favourable local conditions so as to evolve into prosperous mercantile classes strong enough to challenge the newly-arrived trading immigrants from highland Wallo.

An additional source of stimulus to the growth of trade in this part of Wallo was, therefore, the arrival of these immigrants. They gradually succeeded in supplanting their indigenous counterparts because they had the support of the ruling chiefs and because they possessed a long experience in long-distance trade while operating in their own home bases in Gondar, Dariā, Enfrāz and Warra Himano. Their settlement in Qāllu and Dawway also coincided with the revival of commerce in the hinterland and with the consolidation of local dynasties.

The history of the rise to prominence and expansion of Dawway as the most important commercial entrepôt in the whole of eastern Wallo is encapsulated in the account of the settlement of non-indigenous groups of merchants who, in alliance with the local rulers, took control of the existing trading network from the hands of the petty traders whom they gradually turned into their commercial agents.³² Their arrival must have therefore brought about a considerable degree of social dislocation and readjustment, especially if we bear in mind that not only were the new settlers given encouragement to exploit

the trade with the coast, but were also granted extensive agricultural land,³³ which was cultivated by slave labourers, and even perhaps by the dispossessed indigenous people. It must have also led to tension and friction between the immigrants and the local traders and cultivators, one consequence of which, according to an informant, was the fleeing of a substantial number of the latter, especially the Oromo, to the lowlands.³⁴ This suggests that the immigrants had the upper-hand since they enjoyed the support and protection of the local chiefs. The fear of a potential threat from the disaffected members of the local community, and of raids from the lowlanders, engendered a sense of apprehension amongst the leaders of the settler community, and led to the adoption and strict application of an exclusivist policy reflected in the prohibition of intermarriage with those not engaged in trade, and the enforcement of residential segregation of artisans. Hence, the social organization of the Dawway merchant families reflected this overriding concern for safeguarding the class, ethnic and economic interests and identity of the community, and a desire to curtail severely social interactions with other groups.³⁵ The likelihood that such an introspective and closed society might discourage trade was offset by exceptional and calculated marriage alliances with members of the local trading and ruling families.

The leading Argobbā traders had their centre at Moṭā. When the Amharic-speaking trading families came to the area, they established their own settlements, the principal of which was Madinē, about twenty miles southwest of Kamisē. From the ruins of the walls of several two-storeyed buildings, which are an architecturally exceptional feature in the whole area, and are believed to have been constructed by Arab masons early in the twentieth century, we can have some idea of the degree of sophistication of settled life and the comfort and luxury of the wealthy merchants who resided in it. The stones were quarried by slave labourers while the Argobbā artisans helped the chief masons during the work of construction.³⁶

The new settlers also established a near-monopoly over the office of the *naggādās* (chief of customs). Those who were considered for

³² Traders in Adas, Warra Himano, were also given land: *Shaykh 'Abd al-Salām*.

³³ Informant: *Abu Kabbo Yūsuf* (Madinē, 25 March 1983).

³⁴ Cf. Cohen, "Cultural Strategies . . .", pp. 271–72.

³⁵ Informant: *Shaykh Yāsīn* (Kombolchā, 15 March 1983). See also Stitz, "The Western Argobbā of Yilat," pp. 89–90.

appointment by the governors of Reqqē, or even by their overlords, came from the immigrant families.³⁶ For instance, in the late nineteenth century, one *Mäggäthas* Muhammad Yäsün was directly appointed by Rās Mikääl, the contemporary potentate of Wallo.³⁷

Besides Moñā, the most important trading settlements and markets in Dawway were Borā, Arraf Lebbē and Kārrā Dibo.³⁸ According to an oral source, Kārrā Dibo, which means “the narrow pass”, was the oldest market in the region.³⁹ The most famous trading settlement used both as a residence of the richest merchant families and as a depot was Madinē. Before its establishment, the major traders’ residence was at Moñā.⁴⁰

The founders of Madinē were immigrant trading families who had hailed from Warra Himano and whose ancestors had originally come from Gondar, Dariñā, Enfrāz⁴¹ and Arbāmbe.⁴² Traders from Dariñā have been known for their enterprising and far-flung commercial activities which took them to as far as south and southwest Ethiopia.⁴³ It is therefore quite possible that their migration to Wallo was commercially-motivated. When the pioneers of those groups first came to Dawway, they settled at a place called Atāri on the top of a hill west of Madinē.⁴⁴ Madinē itself was founded in the time of Berru Lubo, the governor of Qāllu. More specifically, an informant suggested the year A.H. 1240/1824 A.D. for the founding of the settlement.⁴⁵

There are conflicting accounts about the causes for the emigration of the traders. One version asserts that it was because they had been persecuted as a religious minority that they decided to leave their homeland.⁴⁶ Another states that they emigrated in search of

³⁶ Similarly, in Adas, the *maggādāses* were chosen from among the resident merchants who originally came from Gondar: *Shaykh* ‘Abd al-Salām.

³⁷ Informant: *Shaykh* Ahmad al-Tayyib (Kamisē, 29 March 1983).

³⁸ Informant: *Shaykh* Yäsün.

³⁹ Informant: *Shaykh* Ahmad.

⁴⁰ Informant: *Shaykh* Yäsün.

⁴¹ According to *Abo* Kabbo, most of the traders who eventually settled at Madinē were from Enfrāz.

⁴² Informant: *Shaykh* Yäsün.

⁴³ Abir, “Trade and Politics,” pp. 86–87; Alidussamad H. Ahmad, “Dariñā, Bagemdir: An Historic Town and its Muslim Population, 1830–1890,” *JfHHS*, 22, 3 (1989), pp. 439–51.

⁴⁴ The Amharic word, *aiāri* (lit.: ‘one who puts up a fence’) has come to mean ‘trader’; see Asnake, op. cit., p. 270.

⁴⁵ Informant: *Abo* Kabbo.

⁴⁶ Idem. However, there is no evidence for this assertion. It is in fact a projection of the situation in the early 1880s back to the 1830s and 1840s.

better economic opportunities.⁴⁷ The third account relates that originally they had been brought from Gondar by Amadē Kolāsē, the hereditary ruler of Warra Himano in the 1790s, and a second group by Emperor Yohannes IV.⁴⁸

When they arrived in Dawway, Berru’s vassal in Reqqē, from where the area of Madinē and the surrounding districts were administered, was Gobazzē Lēnchā, alias Qānqē.⁴⁹ On behalf of his lord, Berru, Gobazzē accorded them the necessary protection and authorization to set up their own settlement. Subsequently, during the time of his son and successor, Muhammad, their position was firmly consolidated. He gave them all the support they needed in return for their commercial services; importing for him and his court a variety of goods: carpets, muskets, beds, drinking glasses and other household luxuries.⁵⁰ These were sometimes purchased with the money advanced to them by other notables. In return for their services, the big merchants were taxed lightly. The chiefs also used to lend money to traders who did not have sufficient capital and to share the proceeds with them.⁵¹ This enabled the new immigrants to entrench themselves as influential and rich mercantile families in the area. Among the well-known leaders of the earliest families were *al-Hājjis* Ḥamza, al-Amin, Badru, Muhammad Sañd and Muhammad Nūr.⁵²

The site of the village of Madinē, located on the summit of a rocky hill, was chosen by the immigrants—who can be considered as the easternmost branch of a wider Muslim commercial diaspora coming from Bagēmder and Tegrāy during the last decade of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries—because it was easy to defend against raids from the nomadic inhabitants of the lowlands below it, or from the agriculturalists of the surrounding countryside.⁵³

The people of Madinē were exclusively engaged in trade, leaving the cultivation of the land to slave labourers. The land was granted to them by the governors of Reqqē to whom they paid tribute. Many of the Oromo-speaking cultivators, from whom the land was alienated,

⁴⁷ Informant: *Shaykh* Yäsün.
⁴⁸ Asnake, op. cit., pp. 267, 270; informants: *Shaykhs* ‘Abd al-Salām and Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn.

⁴⁹ On the power and influence of Gobazzē, see Harris, op. cit., I, p. 183.

⁵⁰ Informant: *Abo* Kabbo.

⁵¹ Informant: *Shaykh* Ahmad.

⁵² Informant: *Abo* Kabbo.

⁵³ Idem.

had to flee to the lowlands, while some were gradually assimilated by the new settlers through intermarriage. The traders also intermarried with the Afar clans, presumably in order to facilitate commercial relations, since the trade with the coast traversed the Afar territory. Marriage alliances were arranged to retain the goodwill and patronage of the local nobility.

The responsibility for administering justice was entrusted to the Reqqē chiefs who, however, consulted the *'ulamā'* at Gaddo on religious matters. The chiefs also appointed the *maggūdūs* of Dawway who used to reside at a place called Dibdibē (now deserted), located half-way between Borā and Madinē.

In order to safeguard their privileged status as a commercial aristocracy, the merchants allowed no marriage with members of other professions, although they intermarried with other trader families, who like themselves, originated in Gondar and Enfrāz, but who settled in other parts of Wallo.⁵⁴ Weavers, smiths and *fugqā* (exorcists) were strictly prohibited from settling at Madinē, and anyone found there was severely punished and forced to live at segregated localities, one of which was Dibinā, entirely inhabited by smiths;⁵⁵ another was Gandabā, where daggers and spears were made both for the local people and especially for the nomads of the lowlands.⁵⁶ Although the artisans and weavers were not persecuted, they were forbidden to intermarry with the traders.⁵⁷

The society in Dawway in general, and the community at Madinē in particular, consisted of a number of distinct social and economic groups who stood in differing relations to the principal source of livelihood: commerce and cultivation of the land. At the top of the hierarchy was the commercial aristocracy made up of the big merchant families and led by wealthy traders who also constituted the landed nobility. Below them was the middle-class consisting of commercial agents of the big merchants and petty traders who had sufficient capital to do business at the centres of medium-distance trade. Next came the weavers and other members of the artisanal class who lived in separate settlements, and the tenants who owned small plots of land. The fourth category comprised the slaves who worked as domestic chattels and agricultural labourers.

This socio-economic stratification was generated and reinforced by the highly restricted access to wealth accruing from the caravan and local trade, which the big merchants monopolized, and owing to the relative insignificance of land as a source of wealth and power, in sharp contrast to western and central Wallo. There the concentration of military and political power in the hands of the ruling chiefs, the pursuit of activities related to warfare and authority, and the predominantly agricultural economy precluded the rise of prosperous merchant communities. In Dawway the prominence of the wealthy trading class was further strengthened by marital and residential regulations.

The most important market in Dawway was at Arraf Lubbé. Borā, founded later, was originally a customs post. Goods destined for Karrā Dibo were taxed at Borā, while taxes on those going to Madinē were levied at Dibdibē.⁵⁸ The officials in charge of assessing and collecting the taxes were directly responsible to the Reqqē chiefs. The most important source of revenue was the trade in salt, brought by the Afar merchants, and in slaves in transit to Tājura from Ifat.⁵⁹

While the principal local export items consisted of hides and skins, and some grain, the trade in slaves was also brisk in the period with which this chapter is concerned.

Slaves were brought by the Ifat dealers from southwestern Ethiopia. An informant related that at the market of Anchārro, there was an open quarter where slaves were purchased.⁶⁰ At Madinē, however, the slaves were kept in private houses before being forwarded to Tājura. There were brokers who arranged the business transaction between the local traders and the leaders of the slave caravans.⁶¹ The volume of the slave trade between Tājura and southeastern Wallo was higher than that between Tājura and Shawā.⁶² Pankhurst has suggested a "total annual figure, for the two ports [Tājura and Zeila], of 6000 [slaves] . . ."⁶³

⁵⁴ Informant: *Shaykh Yasin*.

⁵⁵ Conti Rossini wrote that Reqqē was also a halting-place for the slave caravans going to the coast: "Uggerat, Raia Galla . . ." op. cit., p. 17, n. 58.

⁵⁶ *Shaykh Ahmad* made the interesting point that since shoe-making was unknown, it stimulated the export of hides and skins.

⁵⁷ Informant: *Shaykh Yasin*.

⁵⁸ On this, see Abir, *Era of the Princes*, pp. 59–61.

⁵⁹ Idem, "Trade and Politics," p. 223.

⁶⁰ Richard Pankhurst, "The Ethiopian Slave Trade in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: A Statistical Inquiry," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 9, 1 (1964), p. 226. The literature on the Ethiopian slave trade is extensive. On a recent attempt

⁵⁴ For instance, those of Adas and Anchārro.

⁵⁵ Informant: *Shaykh Yasin*.

⁵⁶ Informant: *Shaykh Ahmad*.

⁵⁷ Idem.

Most of the slaves were destined for the Hijāz, not for Aden, because of the British prohibition of the slave trade.⁶⁵ Since one of the principal factors for the emergence of Tājura was the growing external demand for slaves, it also indirectly contributed to enhancing the role of Dawway as a transit centre for the trade. Taxes on slaves were paid in Maria Theresa thalers or in kind: one out of every ten slaves was a standard rate. The slaves thus collected were either sold to the slave dealers themselves, or, if they were young female slaves, they were retained in order to become concubines. Many of the male slaves were employed as labourers on land. On the average, a prosperous merchant or a landowning family had at least ten slaves working as domestic servants, farm labourers, hounds, men, or as assistants to caravan traders.

In addition to the indigenous traders, there were also a small number of immigrant Arabs, mostly from Aden, who lived at a place east of Madinē called Fursē and were largely engaged in the transport of salt and other merchandise from Tājura for which they used their camels.⁶⁶ Others worked in the salt mines in Awsā, or served as guides to the caravans going to the coast, and on the basis of mutual agreements entered into between them and the traders, they organized and supervised the transport of goods.⁶⁷ There were also

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⁶⁶ In March 1983 the present writer met at the Saturday market of Borā (south-east of Kamisē) an Arab from Aden, then aged about 85, named Rājih (now deceased). He said that he first came to Dawway in the time of Empress Zawditi (d. 1930). He had five camels for sale and was riding another. He also said that he earned his living by hiring out his camels to itinerant caravan traders for transporting goods from one market to another. Rājih was fluent in both the Oromo and Afār languages, and judging from his attire and manners, he seemed to have been well-integrated into the local community. However, as the only representative of the small Arab community which once flourished in the area, he resided in isolation in a house located on a hilly spur by the main road to Borā. For a price

⁶⁷ This recalls Abir's statement to the effect that the Wallo and Tājura merchants

slave dealers from Channo and Arab camel-owners from Harar who regularly visited the Dawway markets.⁶⁸

The total length of time that caravan merchants spent on the outward journey to the coast, including their stay at Tājura while displaying of their goods and purchasing imported commodities, and on the return journey, was over six months. One informant said that this was because there were numerous halting-places and customs posts all along the caravan route.⁶⁹

It is estimated that each of the wealthiest merchants such as *al-Hājj* Badru and others had a working capital of up to 100,000 thalers, i.e., £20–25,000 nineteenth-century sterling, excluding property in houses, slaves, livestock and land.⁷⁰ They traded in sundry items such as hides and skins, incense and slaves. Business competition amongst the big merchant families was rife not only over trade but also over winning the favours of the rulers through the provision of exotic and expensive gifts. The chiefs naturally encouraged such a rivalry as a mechanism of controlling the traders effectively.⁷¹ The most successful and intimate ones were often rewarded handsomely with land and, sometimes, with positions of authority within their own localities.⁷²

The slaves taken via Dawway were in high demand both by the Arabs across the sea and by the Tājurans themselves. The Arab traders who travelled to Awsā to purchase female slaves for their *ka'īms* preferred the more light-skinned and younger ones. So did the Tājurans who liked to keep them as wives instead of their own local women.⁷³ According to an informant, the reason was because it was more economical to marry from outside their clans since they did not have to buy expensive presents for all members of the bride's family.⁷⁴ As Abir noted, the Tājuran traders were prevented by the Shawāñ and Qāllu rulers from travelling beyond the frontier area to the western Ethiopia for the latter who in return disposed of their merchandise: "Trade and Politics," p. 223.

⁶⁸ Informants: *Shaykh* Yāsīn and *Abū* Kabbo.

⁶⁹ Informant: *Shaykh* Ahmad.

⁷⁰ Informant: *Abū* Kabbo. According to *Shaykh* Ahmad's rather conservative estimate, the richest average trader possessed the following: 50 camels, 4,000 thalers and 20–30 slaves.

⁷¹ Informant: *Abū* Kabbo.

⁷² An informant, describing early 20th-century trade in Wallo, spoke of wealthy and well-established merchants who actually sought appointment as *négūshas* by the political authorities, largely because the position was prestigious. *Abū* Hāyē Fāris (Sandai), cast of Boru Sellassé, 7 miles northwest of Dessie, 18 June 1983).

⁷³ *Abū*, "Trade and Politics," p. 236.

⁷⁴ Informant: *Shaykh* Yāsīn.

sources of the slaves. Therefore, they had to rely on the local merchants in Shawā at such markets as 'Abd al-Rasūl, and Madinē in Dawway, for the supply of the slaves.⁷⁵ "Dawc served as a meeting point between the Wollo Muslim merchants buying slaves and other merchandise from Gojam and Enarca, and Afar merchants who were not allowed to go beyond this point."⁷⁶ This was an important advantage which strengthened the dominant commercial position of the Dawway merchants, kept out potential rivals, and preserved their monopoly over the transit trade to the coast.

The major imported items included different varieties of clothing fabrics for men and women; incense, silk; better-grade salt extracted from the saline beds of Lake Assal;⁷⁷ beds and carpets from "Ajam" (Persia) which were destined for the nobility; gold bars called *abū'l-kayyil* (horse brand) and *abū'l-fil* (elephant brand); swords and muskets; silver- and gold-coated ornaments, bracelets and necklaces; bars of sugar; *hajar*, and sugar candies (*sukkar al-nabāt*) from Aden; frankincense, rice and perfume; razors, needles, kohl, metal utensils and glassware; and embroidered robes for the chiefs.⁷⁸ The taxes on bulky goods brought in large quantities, such as salt, were assessed according to the size of camel loads: a sack of salt was paid in tax on a load of forty sacks. Other commodities were taxed on the basis of often arbitrary, visual estimates of their value.

Hides and skins, and slaves, were the major export items passing through Dawway. However, gold brought from western and southwestern Ethiopia in small quantities was locally used for making ornaments, and not for export. Locally-woven cotton cloths and live-stock for breeding in the lowlands were also exported.⁷⁹

The major media of exchange were the thaler, fractions (*epyale*) of salt bars (*amole*), and cartridges. The thalers were used to purchase mules and cattle. There was also considerable bartering. Pepper⁸⁰ was exchanged for cotton, salt for grain, and coffee for butter.

There were several major markets in Qāllu proper to which those in Dawway were linked. To the northwest was the market of Anchāro

which rose to prominence as early as the 1830s,⁸¹ not in the time of Yohannes IV.⁸² As noted above, it was renowned for its open slave market. Its location near Ayn Ambā, capital of the Qāllu lords, was an important asset since it enjoyed their protection. It was accessible from the south to merchants from Dawway because it was part of the district of Argobbā which bordered on Dawway. In the time of Yohannes, Muslim traders from Gojām, Bagēndēr and Tegray settled in and around Anchāro.⁸³ Tōolā in western Qāllu was one of the great markets in Ethiopia.⁸⁴ To the northeast of Anchāro, outside Qāllu proper, Bāti developed as a market and a centre of the caravan trade in the 1880s. According to oral sources, it was founded by a group of Afar merchants from Tājurā⁸⁵ who chose the site for its proximity to Awsā and the hinterland of Wallo. Like the Dawway markets further south, the main exports which passed through Bāti were hides and skins, and slaves.

The most important trade-routes from Dawway led to the markets of Channo and 'Abd al-Rasūl in Ifāt and Aliyyu Ambā, south of Ankobar, in Shawā proper. Slave traders from the first two markets frequented Dawway since it served as a transit zone. Harari merchants and Arab camel-owners also travelled from Harar to Dawway to do business in the various markets.⁸⁶

In Dawway trade was occasionally disrupted whenever the Oromo and the Afar were engaged in feuds or when the latter occasionally raided its frontier.⁸⁷ There were also frequent conflicts between the Qāllu rulers and their vassals in Reqqē because of the latter's rebellions aimed at ending their allegiance to their overlords. The Dawway chiefs also attempted to annex Arṭumma and this led to many armed clashes. A local Arabic fragment⁸⁸ records that in the early 1830s, Berru Lubo ravaged Reqqē and expelled its governor, a certain Abbé Mansūr, who fled to Arṭumma which Berru sacked latter. In 1834-35 and in 1865, there were outbreaks of famine and pestilence which

⁷⁵ Abir, *Era of the Princes*, p. 62.

⁷⁶ Item, "Trade and Politics," p. 197.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 175.

⁷⁸ Informant: *Shaykh* Ahmad.

⁷⁹ Idem.

⁸⁰ Idem. In the mediæval period, pepper was used as a medium of exchange:

⁸¹ Isenberg and Krapf, *Journals*, pp. 391, 403-4; Leffebre, *Voyage*, II, pp. 107, 129, 183.

⁸² Asnake, op. cit., p. 270.

⁸³ Ibid., citing oral sources.

⁸⁴ Isenberg and Krapf, op. cit., pp. 40, 362, 390, 391.

⁸⁵ Informants: *Sheykh* Muhammad Sirāj (Bāti, 18 July 1983), and 'Ali.

⁸⁶ Informant: *Sheykh* Yāsīn.

⁸⁷ In the possession of *Abu* Kabbo.

wrought great havoc. In 1869 there was a long drought which affected the whole of Dawway⁸⁹—all of which drastically reduced the production and supply of grain and cattle, and led to the decrease in the volume of both internal and foreign trade.

The caravan trade from the Dawway markets was organized by the leading merchants who had the requisite capital and the support of the chiefs. Under them were smaller traders to whom they often provided some initial capital and with whom, especially if they were from their own community, they shared the profits. The big merchants purchased for the local chiefs a variety of commodities ranging from luxury goods such as carpets and silk robes to ornaments. They rendered these services in order to maintain the goodwill and continued patronage of the authorities.

Taxes on goods carried on long-distance trade were an important source of income for the local rulers. The big merchants also derived considerable profits out of it. Hence the caravan trade can be said to have reinforced commercial prosperity and political power to a greater extent than is usually thought, to have increased their interdependence, and to have guaranteed the predominance of the trading and ruling classes over the agricultural and nomadic populations both in Qāllu and Awsā. The alliance between chiefs and merchant families—through marriage and vested economic interests—is therefore of crucial importance for an understanding of the privileged position which the leading merchants held in the communities of southeast Wallo.

The viability of the long-distance trade leading both to the coast and to central Wallo, Tegrāy and to Shawā in the south, from its nucleus at various centres in Dawway, depended not only on the continued flow of imported goods but also on the regular supply of locally-produced commodities—hides and skins, cotton and grain—and of products brought from further afield: slaves from southwest Etiopia and salt from Awsā. Hence the basis for the organization and operation of trade was the existence of a network of local markets in Qāllu such as Anchāro and Totolā in northwest Qāllu, and, above all, several markets in Dawway itself such as Arraf Lebbē, Kārrā Dibō, Borā and Harāwā. It should be stressed that the existence of such markets within a small territory like Dawway suggests

⁸⁹ This is confirmed by oral sources: *Shaykh Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn*.

quite considerable to justify their establishment. Hence Dawway was more than a transit zone for the export of slaves to Tājurā;⁹⁰ it was also a commercially viable and prosperous entrepot which linked northern and western Wallo, and northern Shawā, to the coast.

The local markets of Dawway were held on a weekly basis: some, like Kārrā Dibō and Borā, on Saturday; Anchāro, on Thursday; and Harāwā, on Monday. To these markets came traders from the surrounding areas and from Aliyyu Amba and Channo, from Awsā as well as from western Wallo and southern Tegrāy. Goods were displayed at the different stalls and quarters of the markets which teemed with commodities such as salt from the lowlands, imported fabrics, grain, pepper, sheep, goats, camels and cattle. The markets reflected the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the surrounding communities. They also provided an occasion for social interaction between highlanders and lowlanders.⁹¹

Whereas in the central Ethiopian highlands the rainy season between June and September disrupted trade,⁹² in Dawway, where the annual precipitation was much more limited and predictable than in the plateau, trade continued on a more or less regular basis throughout the year. This was an additional advantage not only to the local merchants but also to the authorities who were able to levy taxes on goods and thus increase their revenue.

The Dawway wealthy merchants were also noted for the support they gave to the local Muslim scholars and for their generosity in providing for the sustenance of the clerics and their students. They procured for them books and other types of reading and teaching material from the Hijāz, Egypt and the Yemen. These were either sold at reasonable prices to the students who were trained at the various centres of learning, or they were given free of charge to some of the well-established teachers. According to an informant, although the traders did not often distinguish between simple texts and those of higher literary calibre and relevance, so long as they were printed in Arabic,⁹³ the fact that they were now available to the scholarly community was quite significant in itself. Thus the big traders can be said to have contributed to the preservation and perpetuation of traditional Islamic education at the local level.

⁹⁰ Asnake, op. cit., p. 27.

⁹¹ Abir, *Era of the Princes*, p. 50.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Informant: *Shaykh Muhammad Zaki*.

Some of the rich merchants also covered the expenses incurred by the local *'ulamā'* during their pilgrimage. A significant number of pilgrims from Wallo originated from its eastern districts: Garfā, Dawway and Arjummā. This was due to the generosity of rich and pious merchants, and the direct overland access to Tājura which was a closer point of embarkation for the pilgrims than Massawa in the north.⁹⁴ Hence the leaders of the Dawway commercial community were able to cultivate the friendship, and to secure the alliance, of the Muslim scholars as much as they sought and obtained the support of the political authorities. Although piety and religious devotion might have played a part in their relationship with the local *'ulamā'*, there was also the desire on the part of the traders to maintain strong links with those clerics who enjoyed a high reputation as religious leaders, scholars and arbiters in local disputes. Thus, in Dawway, an alliance was forged between the big traders, the clerics and the chiefs from which all three benefited considerably. While the merchants ensured the continuity and perpetuation of their privileged position, and the flow of handsome returns on their investments, the *'ulamā'*, who were materially dependent on the generosity of the traders, were able to devote their efforts and experience to the dissemination and further consolidation of Islam. This stable and cordial relationship between the traders and the clerics was evidently advantageous to the local chiefs who used the revenue from the local and long-distance trade to consolidate their power within Dawway, and even to attempt to challenge interference from their Qāllu overlords.

The commercial importance of Dawway seems to have started to decline especially since the late 1870s and throughout the 1880s because of several factors. Foremost of these was the series of destructive campaigns undertaken by Menilek II, and the punitive expeditions sent or led by Yohannes IV, as part of his policy of religious coercion. The entire territory of eastern Wallo, from Rāyyā through eastern Yajju and Garfā to Dawway, was ruthlessly devastated several times by Yohannes himself or by his vassals in Wallo such as Rūs Mīkā'el and the Shawān king, Menilek. This brought about a great deal of destruction to both life and property, and led to the disruption of commerce upon which the survival and prosperity of Dawway had so much depended. The area was also frequently used

as a base of military operations and a place of refuge by those Muslim leaders who openly took up arms against the forcible mass conversion of the Wallo Muslims, and against the measures taken to enforce it.⁹⁵

Although there are isolated and inconclusive reports that the lowland traders in general were exempted from baptism,⁹⁶ the overall effect of the contemporary violence and devastation must have severely depressed the volume of trade. The second factor which led to the commercial decline of Dawway was the emergence, in the 1880s, of a rival market at Bāti which had direct trading connections with the recently-established port of Assab and with the old port of Tājura.

Nevertheless, Dawway continued to serve as a nucleus of both local and caravan trade, especially for petty merchants, until the last decade of the nineteenth century, although the volume of trade passing through it was considerably less than during the period of its prosperity. This was a direct consequence of developments both on the coast—the rise of the French port of Obock and later, of Djibouti, and the Italian port of Assab—and in the immediate hinterland: the opening of new commercial routes which served these ports, and the emergence of new political and commercial centres in early twentieth-century Ethiopia.

The period when Dawway was a prosperous trading emporium, connecting Tājura with central and western Wallo, northern Shawā and southern Tigray, and the areas beyond them, and when its big merchants were rich and influential enough to be considered a commercial aristocracy whose power and wealth were the envy of both the Muslim clerics and chiefs, had finally and inevitably come to a close.

⁹⁵ For more on this, see the next chapter.

⁹⁶ Richard A. Cauk, "Religion and the State in Nineteenth Century Ethiopia,"

CHAPTER SIX

ISLAM IN WALLO (1850–1890):
CONTAINMENT AND REACTION

The opening of the second half of the nineteenth century was a turning point not only in the political history of north-central Ethiopia in general, and of Wallo in particular, but also marked the onset of reverses for Islam within the region. The revival and reconstitution of imperial power, and the ascendancy of centralized authority, which was a culmination of the long drawn-out struggle between the forces of regionalism and the monarchy, inaugurated a new phase in the relationship between the Christian court and Islam.

Two of the most outstanding emperors of the period under consideration, Tewodros II and Yohannes IV, perceived Islam, especially Islam in Wallo, as an internal source of direct challenge to their policy of unification and centralization, and, allegedly, as a domestic ally of external expansionist powers, Egypt and (for Yohannes IV) the Mahdist Sudan. It also appears that the two monarchs were alarmed by the progress and revival of Islam, an aspect that was analyzed in the third chapter. In their overall perception of Ethiopian Islam, they did not therefore show any departure from the old medieval Christian view which identified Islam as a force of disintegration and a threat to the very survival of the Christian state and society. It was only in the specific policies which they adopted towards Muslims, and in the intensity and ruthlessness with which they attempted to implement them, that they differed radically from their predecessors. Needless to say the main objective of this chapter is not to dwell on the motives, aims and the degree of success or failure of the policies, not because this aspect is irrelevant to the subject under discussion, but because it is fairly well-known and amply-documented. Most of the contemporary sources and later studies specifically dealing with the reigns of Tewodros and Yohannes have described, commented on, and in some cases explained away, the background to, and the political factors which had prompted the adoption of, their religious policies.¹ What has so far remained relatively obscure

is the whole question of the impact, on the local communities, of the measures taken by the monarchs in order to implement the policies, the nature and extent of local reactions, and the immediate and long-term political, social and economic consequences for the region as a whole.

The present chapter seeks to provide an insight into this neglected aspect of the history of indigenous Islam in a crucial period of its existence when it was assaulted by the combined forces of the resurgent Christian state and church, on the one hand, and of the regional political allies of that state, on the other. It attempts to redress the imbalance inherent in some of the available historical accounts which have treated the relationship between the Christian monarchs and Islam, by presenting the traditions and views of the indigenous Muslims. The discussion which follows will address itself to these crucial questions: How did local Muslims see and interpret the policies of Tewodros and Yohannes regarding Islam? How did they react to the specific measures taken? To what extent did the Muslim communities suffer from them? Were the uprisings of the 1880s religious, political, social, or a combination of all of these? The study will especially focus on, and analyze, the armed struggle waged by the Wallo Muslim militant clerics and explain why they, rather than the Muslim lords of the region, led the resistance against forced conversion to Christianity. The discussion of the lives and activities of two of the better-known leaders of this opposition will shed light on the nature and limitations of the resistance.

Tewodros and Wallo: 1855–1865

When Kasa Häylu was crowned as King of Kings of Ethiopia in 1855 and assumed the throne-name of Tewodros II, after having succeeded in breaking the military power of most of the warlords of northern and central Ethiopia, and in terminating the predominance of the Yajju ruling dynasty, he was still paradoxically confronted with the old and tenacious challenge to his authority from the new representatives of the provincial hereditary aristocracies of Tigray in the north, Gojjam in the west, Wallo in the centre, and Shawa in the south.²

¹ See, among others, Caulk, "Religion and the State," pp. 23ff., for a more or less balanced assessment. Zewde Gabre-Selassie, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia: A Political Biography* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 84, 94–100; Sven Rubenson, *King of Kings Tewodros of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa/Nairobi, 1966), p. 59.

² For Shawa, see Kofi Darkwah, "Emperor Theodore II and the Kingdom of Shoa 1855–1865," *JAH*, X, 1 (1969), pp. 105–15.

We have already seen that, beginning from the time of *Imān* Amadē Liban I (d. 1825), there emerged in Wallo south of the Bashilo River a number of competing local political entities each of which was strong enough to resist being overpowered by the other, and over which the Warra Himano dynasts had attempted to establish their dominance. Liban Amadē II (d. 1857), who ruled from 1838 to 1841, was deposed by *Rūs ‘Alī* of Gondar/Dabra Tabor who appointed *Dajjāch ‘Alī* Liban *alias Abba Bullā* (d. 1852). Liban took over again in 1846 and some years later, ‘Alī seized power until his death when he was succeeded by Amadē.

So by the time that Tēwodros came to the imperial throne, there were three local contenders for the control of Wallo: Liban Amadē, the representative of the Māmmadoch dynasty of Warra Himano; Warqitu, who was tutoring the young Amadē ‘Alī (whose father had died in 1852); and Amadē Bashīr, a son of Bashīr Liban, with his centre at Korēb, to the west of Warra Himano. Further south was Adarā Billē of Laga Gorā.

Soon after his coronation on 11 February 1855, Tēwodros and his army marched south to Wallo. Amadē ‘Alī fled to the plains of southern Warra Himano but was captured later, and the emperor took possession of the strategic fortress of Maqdalā on 22 September 1855. In the same year Adarā Billē of Laga Gora died while resisting Tēwodros, and his son, ‘Alī, was later appointed as governor.³ One of the chroniclers of Tēwodros, Walda Maryām, wrote that Tēwodros's second campaign to Warra Himano, which occurred in late 1855, was motivated by his desire to punish Warqitu who had burnt churches at Garagarā.⁴ Shortly afterwards, Liban Amadē, who had been in the meantime appointed by Tēwodros as governor of Wallo, declared his revolt and captured Maqdalā, and the emperor had to march and recapture it.⁵

In 1857 Liban died leaving a young son named Amadē (better known as *Abba Wātaw*, d. 1880), who had been tutored by his mother, Mastawot. In 1858 Tēwodros led a campaign to Wallo for the third time in two years, this time to put down a rebellion led by a powerful contender for the overlordship of Wallo and his own appointee:

Amadē Bashīr, who had proclaimed himself *imām* and transferred his base of operations from Korēb in the west to Feyyal Ambā in Tahuladarē in the east. Although Tēwodros fought and defeated Amadē several times, once in Reqqē,⁶ Amadē eluded capture. The imperial troops pillaged the Wallo countryside and the resulting devastation was so thorough that it gave rise to a serious famine in the area.⁷ The rebellion of Amadē continued and the emperor had to stay in Wallo for a whole year until October 1859. Amadē died in 1861, having ruled as overlord of Wallo for seven years. His brother, Shumin, succeeded him and took up the standard of revolt against Tēwodros who defecated him, and appointed *Abba Wātaw* as governor of ‘Alī Amadē.

In 1860 Tēwodros was once again in Wallo for the fourth time, and yet again in 1862/63⁸ for the fifth and last of his campaigns. In 1865, following Menilek's escape from captivity at Maqdalā, Tēwodros executed Amadē ‘Alī as a revenge against Warqitu who had helped Menilek in gaining his freedom.⁹

What accounts for Tēwodros's repeated and repressive campaigns to Wallo? Several writers have stressed the political objective: the breaking, once and for all, of the power of the Wallo regional dynasts, although they did not ignore the emperor's two other aims: to weaken and neutralize Islam, which was identified as a basis of regional political and cultural identity, and to convert the Muslims to Christianity.¹⁰

The reports of Plowden, the British envoy, which date from as early as 1855, suggest that Tēwodros had made it clear, right from the beginning of his reign, that his intention was to have the Muslims in his domain receive baptism. Plowden described the resistance of the Warra Himano chiefs as a measure taken "in defence of their

⁶ Fekadu, op. cit., p. 17.

⁷ Rubenson, op. cit., pp. 76–77.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 79, 80.

⁹ [Walda Maryām], *Chronique de Théodose*, p. 7 (text). The chronicler also mentions the stiff resistance put up by the chiefs of highland Wallo whose renowned cavalry proved no match to Tēwodros's army.

¹⁰ Rubenson, op. cit., p. 59; *idem*, "Ethiopia and the Horn," p. 76; Donald Crumney, "The Violence of Tēwodros" in Bethwell A. Ogot (ed.), *War and Society in Africa* (London, 1972), p. 68; Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 118.

³ Fekadu, "A Tentative History," p. 14.

⁴ [Walda Maryām], *Chronique de Théodose*, p. 7 (text). The chronicler also mentions the stiff resistance put up by the chiefs of highland Wallo whose renowned cavalry proved no match to Tēwodros's army.

⁵ Rubenson, *Tewodros of Ethiopia*, p. 75.

faith".¹¹ As Rubenson observed, in spite of Plowden's later assertion that Tēwodros's policy towards the Wallo rulers and Islam was "a political and dynastic question rather than a religious one,"¹² to the emperor who called himself 'the slave of Christ', "political supremacy was a means of christianizing and rechristianizing the population, and the growing moral and spiritual strength of the Christian population a guarantee against a relapse into the rule of the country by the largely [sic] Muslim Galla faction."¹³

Subsequent reports by Plowden shed light on both the duration of Tēwodros's campaigns and the intensity of the resistance of the Wallo chiefs. For instance, for most of the year 1857, Tēwodros was in Warra Himano.¹⁴ In a despatch sent in the summer of the following year, Plowden made a reference to a large Wallo force under a chief [Amadē Bashir], together with rebel troops from Tegray. Amadē had, according to Plowden's report, a cavalry force of 50,000 men. Plowden also emphasized the role of Islam as a rallying point and ideology of resistance for the various hereditary chieftaincies of Wallo.¹⁵ In 1859 Plowden reported that the emperor concentrated his forces on the Wallo front in spite of a serious rebellion which was raging in Tegray and that, despite his overall military superiority, the enemy forces could not be pinned down as they followed a calculated and effective tactic of harassment and retreat. Plowden estimated that the chief, presumably of Qāllu, led a large force consisting of 10,000 men.¹⁶

Hence, Tēwodros's policy towards Wallo was motivated both by political considerations: the weakening of regional dynastic power in order to facilitate his programme of reunification,¹⁷ and by ideological factors: "... as a Christian ruler, [he] was resolved to push back its [Islam's] positions in Etniopia . . ."¹⁸ As Crumme pointed out,

Wallo's 'limited' strategic value¹⁹ did not justify Tēwodros's continuous campaigning to repress the revolts.²⁰ He also argued that since the threat of an alliance between local and foreign Muslim forces (referred to by some contemporary observers)²¹ no longer existed, Tēwodros's obsession with the Wallo problem only reflected his failure to assess his national priorities.²² It can also be argued that it was an indication of the degree of Tēwodros's commitment to an essentially negative and destructive policy towards the Wallo question because the rulers there happened to be identified as Oromo, Muslim and unwilling to submit to his authority. There is a strong suggestion in some of the oral traditions that Tēwodros was alarmed by the progress of Islam in the region.²³ While Darkwah ascribed the emperor's anti-Muslim sentiment to his military encounter with the Egyptian troops along the northwestern frontier which had led to a military reverse in 1848,²⁴ Rubenson explained Tēwodros's policy towards indigenous Islam in terms of his own ambition to be master of Ethiopia, and of the Holy Land, which was then under Muslim rule.²⁵

Crumme has recently argued that Tēwodros's activities in Wallo were supported by the contemporary Protestant missionaries for three reasons: firstly, because they hoped that the subjugation of Wallo would inaugurate a period of tranquillity; secondly, they saw the struggle in terms of a confrontation between Christianity and Islam; and thirdly, because they believed that the Wallo "... were the spearhead of the Muslim drive to take over Ethiopia."²⁶ Again it was Crumme who put Tēwodros's Wallo campaigns in the specific context of his plan to bring about national unification. He noted that

¹⁹ This is disputable. The strategic significance of Wallo has been underlined by several writers: Caulk, "Religion and the State," p. 31; R.H. Koff Darkwah, *Sheba, Menlik and the Ethiopian Empire 1813–1889* (London, 1975), pp. 87–88; and Crumme himself, "Cäcäho and the polities . . .," pp. 2–3, 4.

²⁰ Crumme, "Violence of Tēwodros," p. 72.

²¹ This is discussed in Abir, *Era of the Princes*, pp. 115–16.

²² Crumme, op. cit., p. 74.

²³ Informants: *Shaykh* Muzaaffar and Muhammad Zaki. On the rapid expansion of Islam in north/central Ethiopia at the time, see Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, pp. 111–13.

²⁴ Darkwah, "Emperor Theodore," p. 107.

²⁵ Rubenson, *Tēwodros of Etniopia*, pp. 59–60. See also *idem*, "Shaykh Kasa Haylu"

¹⁴ PRO, FO 1/10, folios 80, 88: Plowden from Dambiyā, 2 April and 20 May 1857.

¹⁵ PRO, FO 1/10, f. 233r–v: Plowden from Warra Himano, 5 July 1858.

¹⁶ PRO, FO 1/10 folios 344, 352: Plowden to the Earl of Malmesbury, from

¹⁷ Ayn Ambā, 1 February 1859, and Gondar, 18 June 1859.

¹⁸ An informant, *Shaykh* 'Alī, emphasized this aspect: the refusal of the Wallo chiefs to submit to Tēwodros.

¹⁹ Rubenson, *Tēwodros of Etniopia*, p. 59. See also Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Etniopia* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1994), p. 69.

what distinguished his policy towards Wallo from that which he adopted towards other rebellious provinces such as Tigray, Gojām and Shawā, was the severity of the measures he took to put down the Wallo uprisings, the terrorism he unleashed, and the ruthless devastation his troops caused in Wallo.²⁷

The resistance of the Wallo Muslims was not always a concerted action; it was sometimes seriously divided and consequently undermined by district and personal allegiances. It may be that, as Crumney pointed out in a more general context, Tewodros's position can be said to have been progressive while the rebels appeared to be champions of provincialism.²⁸ However, as Crumney himself admits, the material available to him is limited only to the activities of the rebels in the north, such as Tigray, and the data on those operating in the centre, like Wallo, suggest that although the Wallo chiefs were anxious to preserve their traditional hereditary power, they also showed an appreciable degree of willingness to come to an understanding with the emperor. What therefore intensified their frequent insurrections and tenacious resistance were, firstly, Tewodros's policy of indiscriminate devastation and destruction of the land, and the deportation of some of the people; and secondly, his clearly anti-Islamic, and even anti-Oromo, stance.

The leaders of the rebellions perceived Tewodros's objectives and activities as being aimed not only at their destruction as a ruling class, but also at undermining the social, economic and cultural foundation of the Muslim communities themselves. Therefore, one can discern a basic contradiction in Tewodros's policy of building a unified and centralized nation-state as much as in his own personality,²⁹ since he was determined to destroy the very elements which were to constitute the society and polity he had set out to rebuild. As Rubenson rightly noted, Tewodros made no efforts to "accommodate his Muslim subjects."³⁰ In this respect, Fekadu's argument that Islam was for the Wallo Muslims a source of inspiration and a basis for the formation of a "political unit outside the organizational framework of Christian Ethiopia which was not willing to permit religious diversity . . ."³¹ is both plausible and substantiable.

However, the available written and oral sources equally emphasize that Tewodros did not impose and enforce a policy of religious coercion involving mass conversion comparable to that adopted in the time of his successor, Yohannes IV.³² In spite of this, the extent of physical and material destruction, and the pillaging of the Wallo countryside, affected the demographic, economic and political vitality of the region for the remaining part of the century: "...the violence of Tewodros dealt the *coup de grâce* to the central provinces."³³

The death of Tewodros in 1868 was followed by a brief interregnum during which Wāg Sham Gobazē Gabra Madhen, hereditary ruler of Wāg and Lāstā, and *Dajjāzmāch Kāsā Merchā* of Tambēn, Tigray, built up their power bases in their respective territories. Gobazē declared himself King of Kings over parts of central and northwest Ethiopia lying to the north of the Bashlo and west of the Takkazzē Rivers, having taken the regnal name of Takla Giyorgis. He established his centre at Gondar. On 11 July 1871 a fierce armed encounter between the forces of Takla Giyorgis and those of Kāsā at Assam near Adwā resulted in the latter's spectacular victory which opened the way to his coronation as Emperor Yohannes IV on 21 January 1872.³⁴

Yohannes and Islam in Wallo

Yohannes IV inherited not only Tewodros's noble objectives of national reunification and modernization through a vigorous foreign policy, but also his commitment to reinforce imperial power with the support of a revived church, to weaken Islam, and to institute a religiously homogeneous society. Since he had fewer internal problems—although faced with threats and several campaigns of invasion by external powers—he carried through the anti-Muslim policy initiated by his predecessor through the wholesale baptism of the Wallo Muslims by official decree. Areas inhabited by those who refused conversion were devastated in the course of several campaigns launched particularly against Wallo and the adjacent regions. Our objective here is not to scrutinize and pass judgment on the

²⁷ Crumney, "Violence of Tewodros," p. 68.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 71.

²⁹ Rubenson, op. cit., p. 79.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 72.

³¹ Fekadu, "A Tentative History," p. 41.

³² Rubenson, "Horn of Africa," p. 76; informants: *Shaykhs* Muhammad Nūr and

³³ Crumney, "Violence of Tewodros," pp. 66, 76.

³⁴ Zewde, *Yohannes IV*, pp. 17–36; Rubenson, *Survival*, pp. 270–71, 274–75.

motives and complexity of Yohannes's religious policy in general. Rather it is to focus on a specific aspect of that policy—that which concerned the Wallo Muslims in particular—in order to explain how it was perceived by the local Muslim communities, and to assess the character and course of their reactions. The role of Islam in inspiring and sustaining these responses will also be discussed. Before introducing the subject of Yohannes's policy towards the Wallo Muslims, we need to take a brief glance at the political conditions which prevailed in the region between 1868 and 1878.

The period following the death of Tewodros at Maqdala in 1868 was dominated by two major developments: the intense and inconclusive struggle for power among the rival factions of the Wallo hereditary dynasties, especially among the descendants of Amadē Liban (d. 1825) of Warra Himano, and the territorial encroachment emanating from Shawā under Menilek who wanted to annex Wallo, and whose intervention aggravated the political crisis which engulfed the region.³⁵ At first the struggle was between Wariqitu and Mastawot. The former had lost her son, the young *Imām* Amadē 'Alī Liban who was executed on the orders of Tewodros in 1865 as a revenge against his mother's complicity in Menilek's escape from incarceration at Maqdala. Mastawot was the mother of Amadē Liban (*Abbā Wātaw*). As Darkwah has remarked, the death of her son robbed Wariqitu of her basis for claiming overlordship over Wallo and therefore she was obliged to share power with her rival, Mastawot.³⁶ Amade Bashir, a grandson of the old Liban, had also proclaimed himself *imām* at this time.³⁷

Eventually the struggle came to revolve around two young representatives of the rival factions of the Warra Himano ruling family: Muhammad 'Alī, brother of the executed prince, and *Abbā Wātaw*, who, according to Brielli's account, had been made *imām* by acclamation.³⁸ In order to restore Wariqitu, who had taken refuge in Shawā, and her son, Muhammad 'Alī, to power as a gesture of his gratitude for a decisive and crucial favour, to establish a potential local ally, and gradually to extend his rule over the region as a prelude to the fulfilment of his imperial aspirations, Menilek undertook

several campaigns to Wallo from 1868 to 1876, and succeeded in subjugating Wallo as far as the natural stronghold of Maqdala.³⁹ The faction led by *Abba Wātaw* had attempted to block Menilek's advance but to no avail.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Muhammad 'Alī often shifted his allegiance and was at different times a vassal of Takla Giyorgis and Menilek, and of Yohannes from 1877. In his struggle against Menilek, *Abba Wātaw* had unsuccessfully appealed to Yohannes for help; therefore he became Menilek's client. These unstable and changing alliances and clientships were symptomatic of the political decline of the Wallo dynasts, which coincided with the rising power of Yohannes in the north and Menilek in the south.

At the 1878 settlement between Yohannes and Menilek, the latter's *de facto* rule over Wallo was recognized and confirmed by the former. On the eve of Yohannes's expedition to Shawā, which led to the *rapprochement*, Muhammad 'Alī burned Menilek's garrison town of Warra Ilu (founded towards the end of 1871), and defected to Yohannes. Menilek then released *Abba Wātaw*, who had been jailed for insubordination and subsequent rebellion, to intensify the conflict and possibly to benefit from it. Later, owing largely to Yohannes's support, Muhammad 'Alī's position and influence grew, while that of *Abba Wātaw* was progressively eclipsed.⁴¹

In the discussion of Yohannes's policy towards Wallo, especially the religious aspect, our starting point is the Council of Boru Mēdā (May/June 1878). Ostensibly convened by the emperor in order to reestablish orthodoxy, and publicly to expose and condemn the adherents of Christian heretical sects within the Church, the meeting concluded its deliberations by issuing a comprehensive edict which called for conformity to the officially-recognized doctrine and enjoined Ethiopian Muslims to embrace the Christian faith, because, as Bahru noted: "There was no room for Islam in his [Yohannes's] ideological world."⁴²

The precise circumstances under which the injunction concerning the Muslims was introduced in the course of the discussions and debates at the synod, and the specific factors which actually prompted

³⁵ Darkwah, *Sieva, Menilek* . . . , pp. 87–90.

³⁶ Ibid., 87.

³⁷ Brielli, "Ricordi Storici," p. 105.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 106.

Yohannes to issue the proclamation, cannot be established as the available sources simply mention it as part of the edict.⁴³ The wording of the injunction suggests that it had been thought-out well in advance. It contains an explicit reference to a historical fact: the devastation of Christian territory by the Muslim forces of *Imām* Ahmād Grāñ, and an allegation: that he or his officers had forcibly converted the local Christians to Islam. Hence, a spirit of Christian vengeance can be seen lurking behind the conception of the edict.⁴⁴ It also contains a promise to honour the life and property of those who scrupulously met the obligation imposed by the new decree. The edict further enjoined the recalcitrant to leave the land since “Muslims have no country.”⁴⁵

According to an Ethiopian scholar, the Muslims of Wallo in particular posed not only an obstacle to the establishment of a religiously homogeneous society, but also a direct political problem since “... they constituted practically a foreign state in the midst of the Christian heartland.”⁴⁶ He added that not only were they actively engaged in the propagation of Islam but were also persecuting and forcibly converting the local Christians.⁴⁷ He also made a number of hardly substantiable assertions about indigenous Islam, and offered what can only be described as rationalizations about Yohannes’s actions. Firstly, “The [Muslim] leaders [of Wallo] who remained, even if they were nominal Christians, were no longer subject to the dictates of the Caliphate.”⁴⁸ Secondly, he states: “Although Yohannes’s aim was to halt the spread of Islam, he never sought to eradicate it from the Empire.”⁴⁹ Thirdly, he concludes: “While these measures [the obligations imposed on the Wallo Muslims to build churches and pay tithes to priests] were strict, they were seldom harsh and never fanatical.”⁵⁰

⁴³ Mondon 74, f. 58a.

⁴⁴ Shägħid ‘Alī also alluded to this factor. See Caulk, op. cit., p. 26, citing a Shawāñ Catholic convert. See also PRO, FO 1/27B, f. 8; Yohannes to Victoria, Adwā, 10 August 1872.

⁴⁵ Mondon 74, loc. cit. Oral traditions have preserved a contemporary saying: “The country of Muslims is Mecca and the house of birds is the oak-tree”; informants: *Shägħid Muhammad Tāj al-Din* and others.

⁴⁶ Zewde, *Yohannes IV*, pp. 96, 100.

There are four points in Zewde’s interpretation which require critical examination because they were advanced to justify Yohannes’s policy rather than to present a balanced assessment of the situation. Firstly, the contention that the Muslims of Wallo represented a “foreign state”. There is no denying the fact that, as discussed in an earlier chapter, there was a hereditary dynasty centred in Warra Himano whose rulers had assumed the title of *imām*, and there were also other local Muslim power bases in the region. However, they were not the only ones in existence at the time. There were in fact other provincial entities which were far more threatening to the position of Yohannes such as Shawāñ under Menick and Gojjām under Takla Haymanot (d. 1910).⁵¹

Secondly, the notion that the Wallo dynasts had been the vassals of the Caliphate does not have a shred of evidence to support it. Thirdly, as Caulk rightly observed, to the Muslim communities of Wallo who were the victims of Yohannes’s policy of religious coercion, it made no difference whether the measures taken were intended to stop the further expansion of Islam or to wipe it out completely, or to facilitate the process of the reunification of the country on the basis of a single state religion. The fact remains that they were subjected to arbitrary and humiliating laws and suffered loss of lives and property. Fourthly, the assertion that the measures were not harsh, although strictly enforced, is absurd: both oral traditions and the contemporary written sources clearly show that the Wallo country was ruthlessly devastated and terrorized, and its communities dispersed, as a result of the continuous punitive campaigns undertaken by the emperor and his vassals to implement the edict.⁵²

Zewde also wrote that since the people inhabiting the peripheral areas had questionable loyalty to the empire, Yohannes was severe towards them.⁵³ But Wallo, as he himself recognized, occupied a strategic position between the north and west, and the south,⁵⁴ and although eastern Wallo could well be considered a peripheral region, there was no external threat from that sector. Finally, it would be misleading to suggest that the Wallo Muslims constituted “groups that were contributing to the division of the country and to bargain

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 256.

⁵² Caulk, “Religion and the State,” p. 40.

⁵³ Zewde, op. cit., pp. 94, 98.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 96, 100.

with foreigners who sought to expropriate parts of the country.⁵⁵ The overwhelming evidence, in fact, points to the hereditary Christian governors on the northern flank of Yohannes's realm who were more susceptible to foreign subversion, and actually served the interests of external Muslim powers, such as Egypt,⁵⁶ than to the Muslim rulers of Wallo, which was geographically far removed from the northern theatre of war with those expansionist foreign powers.

If an unconfirmed report that, on the eve of the Egyptian invasion of 1875, a certain *Shaykh* 'Ali had been sent by one *Imām* Ahmad of Yaju, seeking an alliance with Egypt in order to free himself from Yohannes's domination,⁵⁷ can be confirmed, it would not be a unique case: Christian rulers such as *Wag Shum Kabbada* and *Rūs Waranñā alias Walda Selāsc* of Gondar also did precisely that.⁵⁸ Zewde also refers to Mastāwot's seeking Egyptian/Ottoman help against the Shawāñ threat,⁵⁹ but that cannot be used to substantiate her alleged lack of panionism in the face of an external menace. Furthermore, in order to refute the apparently harsh criticism of Yohannes's severity towards the Muslims, made by Cardinal Massaja, head of the Catholic mission in southern Ethiopia, Zewde argues that the missionary's emphasis on the political motives of the emperor's policy was unjustified,⁶⁰ though Zewde himself had written earlier: "There was a strong political motivation behind Yohannes's religious fervour."⁶¹

One of the most enigmatic aspects about the motives for Yohannes's coercive measures is the existence of conflicting traditions about the immediate internal factors which prompted him to take those measures. The tradition collected by Fekadu which claims that Christian immigrants in Dalāntā who resided in Tahuladarē had appealed to Yohannes to convert the Muslims who had allegedly mistreated them,⁶² cannot be taken at its face value. It is unlikely that the emperor would have been so sensitive to the complaints of a few Christian families as to formulate and implement a major imperial

policy affecting his Muslim subjects. What is more substantiable, though equally intriguing, is the contradictory stand taken by Yohannes himself as articulated in his official correspondence.⁶³

In a letter of 1879 addressed to Queen Victoria, he said that he had been approached and entreated by the Muslims of his country to receive baptism, and disclaimed the use of force in enforcing his decree.⁶⁴ On the other hand, he suspected his Muslim subjects of sharing a common interest with external Muslims.⁶⁵ In a subsequent letter to Achille Raffray, the French vice-consul, he spoke of the Wallo as "... des sauvages dont je voulais faire des chrétiens . . .".⁶⁶ In challenging a widely-held view that Yohannes's measures were induced by the dangers posed by the renewed aggression of an external Muslim power, Egypt,⁶⁷ Caulk argued that since the threat had been eliminated through the decisive victories of Yohannes over the Egyptians in 1875 and 1876, one had to look for an internal cause instead: the political necessity of strengthening unification through religious conformity.⁶⁸ He pointed out that even before the Egyptian invasion, Yohannes had encouraged political subjugation and evangelization.⁶⁹ Nor was he the only one in this respect: Menilek had tried from 1868 to 1876 to establish his suzerainty over Wallo through religious coercion.⁷⁰ In September 1876 the Shawāñ king, having

⁵⁵ It is interesting to note that in one of the published chronicles of Yohannes, there is no reference to the 1878 edict: Baru Tafta (ed.), *A Chronicle of Emperor Yohannes IV (1872–89)* (Äthiopistische Forschungen 1) (Wiesbaden, 1977), p. 151, n. 250; in M. Chaine's "Histoire du règne de Yohannes IV roi d'Ethiopie (1868–1889)," *Revue Sémitique* (1913), pp. 178–91, the date for the council is wrongly given as 1889–90. See also Paul Verghese, "The Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church" in Arberry (ed.), op. cit., I, p. 469, where the year of the edict is incorrectly given as 1880.

⁵⁶ The letter is quoted in Caulk, loc. cit. A similar letter to the German emperor, Wilhelm I, is quoted in Baru Tafta, *Ethiopia and Germany: Cultural, Political and Economic Relations, 1871–1936* (Äthiopistische Forschungen 5) (Wiesbaden, 1981), p. 190 (text), P. 191 (trans.). For the Amharic text and English translation of both letters, see Sven Rubenson (ed.), *Internal Rivalries and Foreign Threats*, pp. 332–335.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 99.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 40–41, 49, 60, 66–67, 69, 77; Rubenson, *Survival*, pp. 326–27, 330–31.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 85.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 99.

⁶² Ibid., p. 94.

⁶³ Fekadu, "A Tentative History," p. 42. Also mentioned in Caulk, "Religion and the State," p. 27.

⁶⁴ Cited in Gabriel Simon, *Voyage en Abyssinie et chez les Gallas-Raias, L'Ethiopie, ses mœurs, ses traditions, le negus Yohannes, les gélites monastiques de Lalibela* (Paris, 1885), p. 194.

⁶⁵ This is similar to Tewodros's fear of an alliance between Muslims in Wallo and Egypt which influenced his policy towards the region: Grummett, "Violence of Tewodros," p. 74.

⁶⁶ Caulk, op. cit., pp. 30–31.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 31.

⁶⁸ Ibid. Cf. G.N. Sanderson, "The Nile Basin and the Eastern Horn, 1870–1908"

received the submission of the Wallo chiefs at Warra Illu, spoke these ominous words:

Since [although] the people of Wallo are now Muslims, they will become our brothers [in faith] if possible, within a year, if not, in two years, through baptism or communion . . . I have come not to plunder and destroy the Wallo people, but to treat them with respect and affection, and to teach them, so that they will delight in the joys of this world and enter, by the Grace of Christ, the Kingdom of God.⁷¹

The second important event after the conclusion of the religious council of Boru Mēdā was the conversion of the two erstwhile rivals of the Māmmadoch dynasty: Muḥammad ‘Alī⁷² and Amadē Liban (*Abbā Wātaw*). The former took the baptismal name, Mikā’ēl, with Yohannes as his godfather. He was also given the title of *rās* and the governorship of a substantial part of the central highlands of Wallo, including Warra Himano.⁷³ Menilek had *Abbā Wātaw* converted; he became Hāyla Māryām and was appointed as a *dajjāzmāch* to rule over Tahuladarē, Qāllu, Garfā, Albukko and Boranā. Elsewhere in Wallo, for example, in Reqqē, Muḥammad Qānqē had also reportedly become Christian. So did the ruler of Garfā who took the Christian name of Hāyla Mikā’ēl with the title of *dajjāzmāch*.⁷⁴

This event marked a turning-point in the long history of Wallo resistance against the imperial policy of subjugation which had been led by the hereditary chiefs of the region. From the time of the conversion of the two principal representatives of the Warra Himano ruling family, the opposition was to be primarily led by Muslim militant clerics.⁷⁵ As Caulk aptly put it: “The most important aspect of conversion may have been the way it re-inforced the dependency of Mikā’ēl and other governors on the Emperor and Menilek through creating filial ties of baptism.”⁷⁶

Yohannes’s earliest campaign to Wallo in order to implement the new edict was in A.H. 1295–96/1878–79 A.D., according to local sources. In that year, in collaboration with *Rās Mikā’ēl*, Yohannes ravaged Yaju and Rāyā, and many *‘ulamā’* and jurists who refused to convert were either killed or had to flee to save their lives. Among those who were forced to leave their homes was the celebrated cleric from Annā, Rāyā, *Faqih* Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad, who died at Koramē in Yaju in 1882.⁷⁷ According to an informant, an Ethiopian Muslim named Muḥammad Jibril fled to the Sudan and paid his allegiance to Muḥammad Ahmad al-Mandī. The former advanced in the direction of Kasalā and began to call the Christians of the contiguous Ethiopian territory to convert. That is why Yohannes’s measures, especially against the Wallo Muslims, grew in intensity after 1885.⁷⁸

Elsewhere in northern Ethiopia, many of the Muslim inhabitants of Gondar, who were compelled to renounce their faith, fled towards Qallabāt in the Sudan. They included both clerics and traders.⁷⁹ An Ethiopian writer has asserted that those Muslims who had resisted forced conversion, and had consequently been persecuted, fled to the Sudan and other neighbouring countries from where they attempted to incite “enemics” against Yohannes.⁸⁰

In A.H. 1298–99/1880–81 A.D. Yohannes ravaged Yaju and Garfā, in Warra Bābbo, and marched towards Qāllu,⁸¹ where his troops committed more atrocities than in any other place. The main reason for this severity was that Qāllu was renowned as an active centre of Islamic learning and propagation, and as the home of famous Muslim scholars.⁸² In 1880 Yohannes founded new churches and ordered the mass baptism of the Wallo and Yaju Muslims.⁸³ He

⁷¹ Roland Oliver and G.N. Sanderson (eds.), *Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 6 (Cambridge, 1985), p. 647.

⁷² Mondon 74, f. 38a-b.

⁷³ According to *Šaykhi* Muhammad Nūr, Muḥammad ‘Alī had received Islamic education up to and including the commentary of the Qur’ān. Most sources—both written and oral—are unanimous on the political motive for his conversion, contrary to Marcus’s assertion: “Having concluded that Wallo was worth a mass, Muhammad Ali led his people to Christianity”: Harold G. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia 1844–1913* (Oxford, 1975), p. 58.

⁷⁴ Fekadu, op. cit., p. 43.

⁷⁵ Caulk, op. cit., p. 32, citing Antonelli, the Italian envoy to the Shawāñ court.

⁷⁶ Fekadu, op. cit., p. 44.

⁷⁷ Caulk, loc. cit.

⁷⁸ Informants: *Šaykhi* Muḥammad Tāj al-Dīn and Muṣṭafā.

⁷⁹ Informant: *Šaykhi* Muḥammad Tāj al-Dīn. Citing an account by an Egyptian official in the Sudan, Zevote, *Yohannes IV*, p. 195, n. 1, also refers to Muḥammad Jibril from the “Galla territory” and to his visit of the Mahdi shortly before the latter’s death in 1885. Yohannes’s severity towards the Wallo Muslims is similar to that of Tēwodros: Crumney, “Violence of Tēwodros,” p. 68.

⁸⁰ Informant: *Šaykhi* Muḥammad Tāj al-Dīn. See also Abdussamad H. Ahmad, “The Gondar Muslim Minority in Ethiopia: The Story up to 1935,” *Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 9, 1 (1988), p. 79.

⁸¹ Takla Sādīq Makuriya, *History of Ethiopia from Asē Tēwodros to Hayla Sellāsé I (in Amharic)* (Addis Ababa, 1948/49), p. 51.

⁸² Fekadu, op. cit., p. 187 (text); Mondon 74, f. 63a; Caulk, op. cit., p. 29.

⁸³ Caulk, loc. cit.

also instructed his vassals, Rās Adāl/Takla Häymānot of Gojjām and Negus Menilek of Shawā, to implement the edict in their respective territories. The latter had Islamic books gathered from all over Shawā and burnt.⁸⁴ In the spring of 1881 both Yohannes and Menilek overran Wallo.⁸⁵ In November 1882 they left Boru Mēdā on a campaign against the Muslims of Qällū who had fled to the lowlands and, having marched as far as Dawway, they returned to base after two months, i.e., in early 1883.⁸⁶ Many ‘ulamā’ of Dawway were killed in the course of the resistance against the imperial campaign. Among them were Shaykh Abbuyyē, a son of Abba Asyya, Shaykh Habib, Shaykh Muhammad Bashir and Shaykh Ahmad Dīn. All these prominent leaders of the local Muslim community died on 24 *Muharram* 1300 A.H./5 December 1882.⁸⁷ In early 1886 about 20,000 men and women who had refused to renounce Islam were massacred on the plains of Bakkē in Qällū.⁸⁸

The Resistance of the Militant Muslim Clerics

Although relatively weak in its organizational capacity and material and manpower resources, open armed resistance to Yohannes's edict and his coercive measures was organized and sustained over a number of years by some of the local Muslim religious leaders. The resistance both preceded and outlived the essentially politically-motivated Wallo rebellions of the mid-1880s.⁸⁹ Islam played a crucial role in the new development: as a source of inspiration and ideology for the leadership of the opposition, and as a means for recruiting followers and soliciting assistance from local sources.

The earliest militant cleric remembered in Wallo as a leader of armed opposition against the policy of forcible conversion was Shaykh ‘Alī Adam, popularly known as Shaykh ‘Alī Jerru, because his family originally came from Jerru in Manz, northern Shawā.⁹⁰ He was

a disciple of Shaykh Muhammad Shāfi‘ of Jamā Negus, who is believed to have given him the permission to fight for the cause of Islam. Shaykh ‘Alī’s shrine on the southern outskirts of Dessie at a place called Bilan, where he was born and buried, later became a centre of local pilgrimage.

Shaykh ‘Alī also inherited the spirit of militancy from his own father, Shaykh Adam, who had been renowned for his jihādist activities in Reqqē. For many years in the 1850s, Shaykh Adam fought the Christians of that area in order to convert them to Islam. Although he did not have many followers and his activities were limited and clandestine, his career seems to have had a strong impact on his more famous son.

Under his command Shaykh ‘Alī had a force of about five hundred horsemen armed with spears and shields. Determined to confront Yohannes in spite of his weak position in military terms, he engaged the emperor’s contingent at Wāhēlo to the northwest of Lake Hayq. His overzealous warriors were defeated and he himself died in the course of the fighting, while his son, Shaykh Yūsuf, was wounded.⁹¹ Shaykh ‘Alī was buried at Wāhēlo but six years later his body was exhumed and reburied at his birthplace at Bilan.⁹²

Although the resistance led by Shaykh ‘Alī was no more than a show of defiance by a militant cleric and did not affect the course of subsequent events in Wallo, it traditionally represents the earliest manifestation of local, cleric-led armed opposition to a policy perceived to be inimical to Islam and the interests of the Muslim communities, and was the first organized attempt made to prevent the implementation of that policy. It was the precursor of the later, more widespread and better-organized revolt led by Shaykh Talha.

The most famous cleric and militant leader in Wallo in the 1880s was Shaykh Talha. Since his career and activities go well beyond the chronological limit of the present study, covering the first decade of the reign of Menilek, our emphasis here will be on his role in the Muslim resistance during the period from 1884 to 1889.

Shaykh Talha b. Ja‘far was the grandson of the famous Dawway saint, Shaykh Yusuf alias Abba Asyya, his agnomen, who died at

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 26.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 30.

⁸⁶ Mondon 74, f. 78b.

⁸⁷ Informant: Shaykh Muhammad Taj al-Dīn.

⁸⁸ Idem; Carlo Conti Rossini, *Italia ed Etiopia dal Trattato d'Uccidere alla Battaglia di Atta* (Roma, 1935), p. 468; Fekadu, op. cit., p. 47.

⁸⁹ Zewde, *Tohanes IV*, pp. 195–98; Caulk, op. cit., pp. 33–37; Fekadu, op. cit., pp. 46ff.

⁹⁰ Informant: Shaykh ‘Abd al-Salām, who provided the bulk of the material on Shaykh ‘Alī. See also Fekadu, op. cit., p. 44.

⁹¹ Informant: Shaykh ‘Abd al-Salām. He did not mention the date but said that the episode took place during one of the earliest campaigns of Yohannes after the 1879 council at Boru Mēdā. Hence the Battle of Wāhēlo might have taken place in 1879/80.

⁹² Idem.

Doddotā in 1835/36. *Shaykh* Ṭalha was born at Arērā Furā in Argobbā (eastern Qāllū)⁹³ around 1850. He received his religious training in Dawway, Reqqē and Qāllū, and later distinguished himself as an able and resourceful teacher. He is regarded as the first indigenous Muslim cleric to have employed the Amharic language in the teaching of Islam and the writing of religious texts.⁹⁴ He is also the author of several as yet unpublished works on theology and on the life of the Prophet most of which were composed in Amharic in Arabic script.⁹⁵

The immediate causes which led *Shaykh* Ṭalha to declare a *jihād* in 1884⁹⁶ were: firstly, the increasing harshness with which the proclamation on the forcible conversion of Muslims to Christianity was being carried out and, secondly, the ban imposed on Islamic worship and preaching. However, he continued openly to propagate and practice Islam in spite of the decree.⁹⁷ Therefore, his movement was clearly one of protest and defiance against the emperor's policy.

Shaykh Ṭalha recruited and mobilized his followers from among the Muslims of Qāllū and Reqqē. An informant said that he also won the allegiance of the disaffected *‘ulamā’* and hereditary rulers of Albukko and Boranā.⁹⁸ This is probably a reference to a later stage of his revolt when he was joined in 1885 by some dissident potenates of Wallo: *Abbā Jabal*, son and successor of *Abbā Wātāx*, Mastāwot and Muhammad Qānqē of Reqqē, all of whom had been recent converts but had been enraged at the misgovernment and high-handedness of Yohannes's son, *Rās Arāyā Sellāsē*, who had been appointed by his father as governor of Wallo in 1882.⁹⁹ Thus the *jihād* led by *Shaykh* Ṭalha seems to have merged with a major political uprising in the region.

In November 1884 Menilek led a campaign to Argobbā to quell the revolt of *Shaykh* Ṭalha, who eluded capture.¹⁰⁰ In January 1886

⁹³ Informants: *Shaykh* Muzaaffar, Muhammad Nūr, ‘Alī, Muhammad Zākī and ‘Abd al-Salām. Also in an Amharic booklet written by *Shaykh* Ṭalha entitled *Tawhid etnā Fiqh* (ed. Sayid Ibārahīm) (*Addis Ababa*, 1958/59), 1st ed., p.i. But according to Conti Rossini, loc. cit., the *shaykh*'s birthplace was at Doddotā.

⁹⁴ Informant: *Shaykh* Muzaaffar; A.J. Drewes, *Classical Arabic in Ethiopia* (Oosters Genootschaps in Nederland 7) (Leiden, 1976), p. 186.

⁹⁵ Idem.

⁹⁶ Mondon 74, f. 83b–84a.

⁹⁷ Caulk, op. cit., p. 33.

⁹⁸ Informant: *Shaykh* Muzaaffar.

⁹⁹ Fekadu, op. cit., pp. 46–47; Caulk, op. cit., pp. 33–35; Zewde, op. cit., pp. 196–97.

¹⁰⁰ Mondon 74, f. 83b–84a.

Yohannes and Menilek set out on a joint expedition and ravaged Chaffa, Reqqē, Arṭummā, in the south, and Garfa, Qallu and Warra Bābbo, in the north. For the Wallo dissidents—both the religious and the political—the unifying factor was Islam,¹⁰¹ in spite of the divergence of their objectives, and although one writer has stressed the political overtones in the rebellion.¹⁰²

The counter-offensive led by the followers of *Shaykh* Ṭalha was directed against the Christian inhabitants of Reqqē and led to the burning down of churches, which the local Muslims had been compelled to build, and to the expulsion of priests who had been sent to give instruction to the new converts from Islam.¹⁰³ The political dissidents also proclaimed an emirate in southeastern Wallo in 1885.¹⁰⁴ Initially, *Shaykh* Ṭalha achieved spectacular success by inflicting devastating defeats upon the forces of Yohannes's commanders leading to losses in men and property.¹⁰⁵ Local traditions speak of a famous armed encounter between the followers of the *shaykh* and those of *Bajerwand* Nawīs (or Lawtē, a senior official in the court of the emperor) at a place called Kilkillo in Dawway. The latter sustained considerable losses in men,¹⁰⁶ Ṭalha's victory has been immortalized in a popular Amharic poem which is believed to have been composed by a contemporary Christian minstrel in the court of *Rās Walē Beṭul* (a *protégé* and brother-in-law of Menilek who died in 1918):

<i>Talāt māmasgan yehonāl’ erji</i> <i>mānum qyāllaw Ṭolaha hājī</i> <i>teryāshu arar yābardall</i> <i>genbāru korbo gārā yenedāll</i> <i>enda Ṭolaha mān yeuwalldāll</i>	Though it would mean praising the enemy no one can surpass <i>al-Hājī</i> Ṭalha his breath could render bullets useless while his forehead could level hills no man like Ṭalha has ever been born when <i>Bajerwand</i> Nawīs needed [a purgative] of <i>koso</i> ¹⁰⁷
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¹⁰¹ Caulk, op. cit., pp. 34–35.

¹⁰² Zewde, op. cit., p. 196.

¹⁰³ Caulk, op. cit., p. 34.

¹⁰⁴ Fekadu, op. cit., p. 47; Caulk, op. cit., p. 35.

¹⁰⁵ Conti Rossini, loc. cit.

¹⁰⁶ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammed Tāj al-Dīn.

¹⁰⁷ A tree (*Hybenia abyssinica*) whose leaves are used for the treatment of tape-worm.

Talha Ja'far ba'bēlo qoyaw

Talha Ja'far waited for him with
a potion

Kīlkīlō malkā gudūn aṣṣayyaw

and exposed his weakness at the
Kīlkīlō River

hullūm maskarwāll endābbarāyyaw

everybody has borne witness to
how he overpowered him.¹⁰⁸

Shaykh Talha also led minor military operations in Arṭummā and, although Yohannes sent his troops to apprehend him, he was never caught. Gradually, the number of his followers increased and he began to recruit disaffected elements from amongst the Asāwurītā and Rāyyā people, especially as he grew suspicious of the loyalty of his original followers from his native district.¹⁰⁹

Oral traditions and contemporary written sources¹¹⁰ emphasize that Talha's revolt was considered by Yohannes and his Wallo vassals as a minor uprising and a passing phenomenon which could be easily dealt with. *Rās Mīkā'ēl* is believed to have once bragged to Yohannes in Warra Ilu by saying that there was no ground for viewing Talha's activities with any degree of apprehension as he was only an ordinary cleric who, under the influence of a heavy dosage of *dhāt*, had lost his senses and incited the local Muslims to commit acts of violence.¹¹¹ Shortly afterwards, news arrived that in a bloody encounter between *Shaykh* Talha's men and *Rās Mīkā'ēl*'s contingent of three hundred troops, the latter were almost wiped out, for which Mīkā'ēl received a sharp reprimand from the emperor.¹¹²

There is a tradition that *Shaykh* Talha had close contacts with the Sudanese Mahdi, with whom he is believed to have corresponded.¹¹³ According to Conti Rossini, however, it was the Mahdi's successor, Abdallāhi, who encouraged Talha to revolt. The *shaykh* is reported to have replied: "You on your part, I on mine, shall defend our religion." This might have been the basis for an alliance allegedly established between them some time in 1887, after *Shaykh* Talha

had travelled via Walqāyet to the Sudan where he was received by the *khalīfa* of the Mahdi. According to the same source, Talha is believed to have joined the Mahdist expedition led by Abū 'Anja who sacked Gondar in January 1888. However, dissatisfied with Mahdist "maladministration", he returned to his base in Dawaway shortly afterwards.¹¹⁴

On his arrival, he discovered that some of his followers had been plotting against him because they suspected that his main interest was to seize political power by seeking external assistance rather than to defend the faith against the assault of the Christian state. *Shaykh* Talha dealt with the renegades severely by leading a surprise night attack against them while they were assembled for a religious function.¹¹⁵ Another reason why some of his followers turned against him was because his activities had led to reprisals from the forces of *Rās Mīkā'ēl* and those of Yohannes and Menilek, and had caused the devastation of Argobba and Ifāt.¹¹⁶

After the death of Yohannes in 1889, *Shaykh* Talha continued to defy Menilek even after the edict of 1878 had been officially rescinded by him. He died in A.H. 1355/1936 A.D., after a remarkable though turbulent life.¹¹⁷

The official religious policy towards indigenous Islam pursued by Yohannes and implemented by his principal vassal in Wallo, *Rās Mīkā'ēl*, and by Menilek, was a serious, though only a temporary, setback to Islam not only as a religion, but also as a basis of social organization and integration of the Muslim communities of the region. Its injustice, and the arbitrariness and harshness with which it was enforced, triggered off stiff resistance from the militant *ūlāma'* that inspired political opposition to the new administrative hierarchy set up by Yohannes from which some of the members of the old ruling class were excluded.

The magnitude of the social dislocation, loss of human lives and material destruction cannot be measured and assessed since we lack sufficient data. However, oral traditions and documentary sources equally emphasize the ruthless devastation of eastern Wallo from 1880 to 1888.

¹⁰⁸ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn.

¹⁰⁹ Idem.

¹¹⁰ Informant: *Shaykh* Muzaaffar. In Mondon 74, f. 83b, Talha is contemptuously referred to as a "*fūqārī*"; exorcist or sorcerer.

¹¹¹ Cf. Zewde's assertion: "... Islam [in Wallo] had only been accepted by a minority of sheikhs and takirs, who used the instrument of religious fervour for their own political ends"; in his *Yohannes IV*, p. 195. See also Verghese, op. cit., p. 470. "Islam never had very deep roots in Wallo."

¹¹² Informant: *Shaykh* Muzaaffar.

¹¹³ Informant: *Shaykh* Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn.

¹¹⁴ Conti Rossini, loc. cit.

¹¹⁵ Informants: *Shaykh* Muzaaffar, Muhammad Zākī and 'Abd al-Salām.

¹¹⁶ Informant: *Shaykh* 'Abd al-Salām.

¹¹⁷ For more on this, see Hussein Ahmed, "The Life and Career of *Shaykh* Talha b. Ja'far (c. 1853–1936)," *JES*, XXII (1989), pp. 13–30.

As for the extent of forced conversion, Arnold estimated that as many as 50,000 Muslims were baptised,¹¹⁸ but all sources are agreed that the conversions were only nominal and a step taken out of desperation and hopelessness rather than out of conviction, and as a last attempt to preserve life and property.¹¹⁹

On the basis of the available evidence, it is possible to postulate three ways in which the Muslims of Wallo reacted to the decree which called on them to convert to Christianity. Firstly, at the level of both the ordinary people and some of the 'ulama', there was the option of an outward pretence of acquiescence. This led to the phenomenon of being seen as a practising Christian while remaining loyal to Islam: "Christians by day and Muslims by night."¹²⁰ Secondly, the enforcement of the edict by violent means caused an exodus of a large number of people, mostly the dispossessed elements of the population, to southcast and southwest Ethiopia, and to the Sudan and the Hijāz. Thirdly, there was militant opposition led at first by members of the religious élite but later strengthened by local political dissidents who were not happy with the newly-established administrative structure in Wallo in which they were placed in a subordinate position, at best, and from which they were excluded altogether, at worst.

Did the upheavals of the mid-1880s therefore represent merely a traditional elitist Muslim reaction to Christian religious and military coercion? Or were they only a political revolt by some dissatisfied elements within the old ruling hierarchy who had been passed over by Yohannes and Menilek? Or again, were they a reassertion of Warra Himano-Qallu predominance and hegemony over Wallo which was increasingly becoming a mere pawn in the subtle trial of strength and *rapprochement* between Yohannes and Menilek? Or did the unrest also reflect underlying deeper social tensions?

Muslim oral traditions and the available secondary sources strongly

suggest that, for the Muslims, the period was one of extreme hardship and struggle for survival and for the preservation of life, property and culture. Other types of sources, both local and foreign, emphasize the political character of the resistance because it has been conventional to view such movements in terms of a broad concept or ideal of political unification or national integration which apparently did not include indigenous Ethiopian Muslims.¹²¹

There are strong hints in the sources which suggest that the tremendous loss of life and wanton destruction of property created a sense of exasperation and defiance amongst the ordinary people, especially the peasantry. As Zewde pointed out, they had to bear a new form of economic burden by being ordered to build new churches and to maintain a Christian clerical hierarchy through the payment of tithes, and to quarter imperial armies.¹²²

Nearly two decades of continuous campaigning in Wallo, first by Menilek from 1868 to 1872,¹²³ and then by Yohannes from 1879 to 1888—not to speak of the devastation during the reign of Tewodros from mid-1855 to 1859¹²⁴—must have impoverished the Wallo countryside to such an extent that agricultural production was adversely affected. This prepared the ground for the deadly impact on the region of the great famine of 1888–92 which swept over northern and central Ethiopia.

Although some writers have tried to connect the Wallo uprisings of 1884–85 either with Egyptian territorial ambitions of the mid-1870s, or with the Mahdist movement,¹²⁵ there is no conclusive evidence of a direct causal relationship between them. As Caulk rightly concluded, the Wallo revolts were essentially brought about by factors internal to Ethiopia,¹²⁶ the most decisive of which was the interference by the Christian court in the religious and political life of

¹¹⁸ T.W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam* 2nd ed. (London, 1913), p. 120; Tringham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 123, citing a 19th-century German traveller's account.

¹¹⁹ Tringham, loc. cit. Shäjkh Muzaaffar related that some of the 'ulama' had to carry out their religious duties—meditation and teaching—in secret locations in order to avoid being apprehended by the local Christian authorities who were instructed to enforce the edict. Shäjkh Muhammad Taj al-Din said that Muslim women were prohibited from covering their faces with veils and the men from carrying rosaries, while Shäjkh 'Abd al-Salām noted that the Muslim call to prayer (*adhan*) was forbidden.

¹²⁰ Richard Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia 1800–1935* (Addis Ababa, 1968), p. 147.

¹²¹ On the basis of Yohannes's peaceful overtures to the Mahdists to establish a common front against the Europeans, Zewde concluded that the emperor's "vision of a strong Ethiopia also included the Muslims": *Yohannes IV*, p. 251.

¹²² Ibid., pp. 97, 195; Marcus, op. cit., p. 84. In the existing literature, the military activities of Yohannes, Menilek and their Wallo vassals are euphemistically depicted as measures taken to bring about the "pacification" of Wallo. Marcus, op. cit., pp. 35, 84, 85; Asnake, op. cit., p. 265.

¹²³ Darkwah, *Sleven, Menilek . . .*, pp. 87–90; Marcus, op. cit., pp. 35–36.

¹²⁴ Crumme, "Violence of Tewodros," pp. 63, 73–74, 76; Rubenson, *Tewodros* of *Ethiopia*, pp. 76–77.

¹²⁵ Zewde, op. cit., pp. 84, 194–95, and local sources and travellers' accounts cited in Caulk, op. cit., p. 35.

¹²⁶ Caulk, loc. cit.

the Muslim communities. Therefore, the ensuing resistance did not require Egyptian aggression and Mahdist incursions, and their inspiration, in order to get under way and sustain itself. There were already in Wallo strong grounds and favourable conditions in which a local movement of resistance could develop against specific hostile measures taken by the Christian ruling hierarchy, in order to curtail the position of Islam and harass the Muslim communities. This does not mean that some of the Wallo 'ulama' were unaware of Islamic currents sweeping across Muslim Africa from the Senegal through the central Sudan to the Nile valley—and there are isolated references to some dissidents like Muhammad Jibril and Shaykh Talha soliciting assistance from the Mahdi and his successor.

However, the underlying causes remained essentially local and the relationship between these two Muslims and the Mahdists followed, not preceded, the persecution of the Wallo Muslims. Besides, there is no evidence that Mahdist help, if any, ever played a significant role in the Muslim resistance in Wallo. In fact, as we saw earlier, Shaykh Talha abandoned the Mahdist cause either because he was not treated with deference in the Mahdist court, or more importantly, because he was dissatisfied with the regime of *Khalifa* 'Abdallāhī, most likely since he believed that the Mahdists were more interested in using him against Yohannes than in coming to the relief of remote and hard-pressed Muslim communities.

Did the Wallo Muslim resistance led by the militant clerics achieve its objective of turning the tide of Christian zeal and evangelism, which expressed itself in attempts at the mass conversion of the Muslims of the region? Or did it peter out once it lost its momentum and degenerate into a frontier problem in the eastern lowlands of Wallo?¹²⁷ Or still, was it overshadowed by the political revolts of 1884–85? There is no doubt that the military superiority of the forces of Yohannes, Menilek and Mika'el was a major factor which enabled the edict to be implemented as long as it did. However, the frequency and severity of the campaigns launched, and the devastation and disintegration of the Muslim communities which they unleashed, suggest that the resistance must have been stiff and of long duration. That is why Yohannes and Menilek had to lead joint expeditions to eastern Wallo from as early as 1880 up to 1885–86.

Although there was nominal conformity to the injunctions of the decree, it was brought about at the price of numerous and costly military campaigns, and the conversions were superficial. Thus the

resistance can be said to have played some role not only in tying down the forces of the Christian rulers who were determined to put the edict into practice, but also in harassing the Christian garrisons and clergy sent to look after the new converts, and in encouraging covert opposition among the ordinary people against the policy, thus minimizing the likelihood of a thorough conversion.

Just as importantly, the militant opposition also directly influenced the policy of Yohannes's successor, Menilek, who in 1889, restored freedom of worship.¹²⁸ However, it was not out of benevolence or progressive outlook that the new emperor reversed his predecessor's policy of religious coercion as an instrument of building a unified nation-state, but largely because, firstly, he had himself seen how persistent and unrelenting the resistance had been; and secondly, he was realistic enough to foresee that a further attempt to pursue and implement that policy was bound to bring about an even fiercer and better-organized local resistance, especially since Menilek had by then—the late 1880s—incorporated several petty Muslim states into his empire.¹²⁹ In any case, in spite of the official policy of religious toleration, the Muslims in Wallo, as elsewhere in the country, fared no better than they had been before 1878. Though the ban on freedom of worship imposed during the decade of persecution and repression was lifted, they continued to be subjected, as ever before, to political and social prejudices and disabilities.¹³⁰ As Caulk aptly put it: "Thus the apparently moderate attitudes prevailing once Menilek became Emperor in 1889 need not represent a complete break."¹³¹

The Wallo Muslim resistance is significant from the point of view of the present study in two respects. Firstly, it shows beyond any doubt that indigenous Islam, given the necessary stimulus, was capable not only of inspiring a wide cross-section of the Muslim community to organize and mobilize its manpower and material resources, and to launch an armed opposition against a direct threat to its very existence, but also of sustaining the opposition over a long span of time.

¹²⁷ Tringham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 123.

¹²⁸ Caulk, op. cit., p. 38.

¹²⁹ Informant: Shaykh Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn. On the fortune of Islam in the post-Yohannes period, see Hussein Ahmed, "Islam and Islamic Discourse in Ethiopia (1973–1993)" in Harold G. Marcus (ed.), *New Trends in Ethiopian Studies* (Papers of the 12th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies) (Lawrenceville, NJ, 1994), I, pp. 775–801.

¹³⁰ Caulk, op. cit., p. 41.

That Islam played a crucial role as a unifying ideology cutting across ethnic, regional and political particularisms is evident from the fact that the opposition led by *Shaykh* Talha included the Muslims of Qālū, Rāyyā and southeastern Tegrāy, as well as disaffected elements of the Wallo hereditary dynasty. The movement was not, however, either in its inception or objectives, a politically subversive one directed against the Ethiopian state under Yohannes, but only a reaction to a specific policy initiated by him and implemented by his subordinates—a policy which was essentially and overtly anti-Muslim. Secondly, it shows that indigenous Muslims, far from being the domestic and natural allies of external aggressive forces, had in fact proven themselves to be unwilling to collaborate with them against the country, and that they were no less loyal or patriotic than the Christians.¹³¹ The mere fact that they shared a common faith with both the Egyptians and the Mahdists did not necessarily and actually make them any less sensitive to the ulterior designs and ambitions of those powers on Ethiopian sovereignty. The most telling evidence for this is that they showed a marked reluctance to look beyond their own frontiers to obtain external help and to ally themselves with foreign powers, even at a critical moment in their history, when they were unjustly provoked and mistreated by the Christian state and church for no other offence than following a different religion, and for opposing a policy that was openly advocating their exclusion from national life. Even if they had sought external assistance to defend themselves, their action could have been justified and understandable, unless they were expected to watch passively and delight in their own annihilation. There can be no stronger demonstration of their patriotism and loyalty than such a steadfastness and perseverance in times of torment and official persecution as a religious community.

The resistance of the Wallo Muslims is also a cogent vindication

of the divisive character, impracticability and bankruptcy of a pol-

icy of religious coercion as an instrument of building a nation of diverse elements. It shows that Yohannes's brand of national reunification was no more realistic or progressive than that of his predecessors. Zewde's assertion that Yohannes's "... approach to unification, the use of religion as a major element in cultural uniformity, made progress"¹³² is remarkable only in its boldness, and cannot stand the test of the available evidence, including that which he himself used. So also is his assessment of Yohannes's reign which he described in the following words: "Thus the achievement of his aims, especially insofar as they did not *alienate* portions of the population, whether regional or *religious*, is all the more surprising."¹³³ What is even more surprising is the writer's own statement which he made in connection with his discussion of Tewodros's similar policy towards Muslims: the emperor's edict calling on the Muslims either to convert or to leave the country, was "... a proclamation which was impossible to enforce".¹³⁴ He has therefore failed to present a similar critical and dispassionate assessment of Yohannes's religious policy towards Ethiopian Muslims.

¹³¹ PRO, FO 1/30, f. 310v; private communication to Lord Granville, 11 February 1884. *Shaykh* Talha's desertion from the Mahdist camp, to which we have referred earlier, and his defection from the Italians a year before the Battle of Adwā in 1896 (on which see Conti Rossini, op. cit., p. 469, and Hussein, "The Life and Career . . ." pp. 21–22) is a case in point. Ethiopian Muslims could not demonstrate their national sentiments more concretely because they were never given the opportunity to do so and because they had lived in a clearly-defined and highly-restricted social and economic milieu.

¹³² Zewde, *Yohannes IV*, p. 251.

¹³³ *Idem*, "The Process of Re-unification of the Ethiopian Empire 1868–1889"

(D.Phil. dissertation, Oxford University, 1971), iii (emphasis added).

¹³⁴ *Item*, *Yohannes IV*, p. 14. (Zewde is a great great-grandson of Emperor Yohannes: Ullendorff's preface in *Yohannes IV*, p. vii.)

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

From the present study of Islam in Ethiopia with particular reference to nineteenth-century Wallo, there emerge a number of broad themes concerning the image and historical role of Islam in the context of Ethiopian history, and regarding the patterns of Islam's development at both the national and regional levels.

In the introductory section, it was argued that the received notion of Islam as an inherently divisive and peripheral factor in Ethiopian history and society is in need of revision, and that it cannot stand the test of the available evidence. Contrary to the widely-held view that Islam can only be defined as an external threat to the Ethiopian polity, and had been an internal subversive element, it must be understood that throughout the centuries, the Muslim religion has constituted the basis of the cultural identity of a sizeable part of the Ethiopian population,¹ thereby functioning as an additional basis for the integration of diverse communities into the overall Ethiopian society, which has always had ethnic heterogeneity as its principal characteristic.

The mediaeval political and military conflicts between the Christian state and the Muslim sultanates, which have provided the context

for the perceptions of Islam in Ethiopia among scholars, do not reflect a perpetually antagonistic relationship between the Christian and Muslim communities, or between their respective religions. The wars should not also be seen as the outcome of attempts at national integration by either Christian dynasts or Muslim emirs. They are best conceived and interpreted as periodic clashes between opposing forces of expansion, triggered off by demographic, economic and political motives. Moreover, a "national integration" achieved through the elimination of Islam or Christianity would have hardly deserved its name. In the long history of the coexistence and interaction between the Christian and Muslim communities, those episodes should not be privileged at the expense of the rest.

The present study has attempted to demonstrate that existing popular and scholarly stereotypes of Islam in Ethiopia have no basis in the available historical sources. The main task of the introduction was therefore to identify and explain the persistence of such stereotypes, and to challenge the still dominant historiographical approach to the study of Islam which systematically emphasizes Christian-Muslim conflicts and plays down the more enduring and peaceful interactions between the two sides. One way in which such a glaring imbalance could be redressed is by undertaking specific case studies of regional Islam such as the one attempted here. This may help us to see the local and regional dynamics of Islam and the mutual interactions between Muslims and the rest of the Ethiopian society, of which Muslims have been an integral part. It was also argued that the extant sources, not to mention the material which is potentially available within the indigenous Muslim communities, if judiciously examined, can not only reveal new insights about Ethiopian Islam itself, but also offer fresh perspectives to Ethiopian history as a whole.

Moreover, there is a need for taking the indigenous character of the Ethiopian Muslim culture into consideration in any generalization about Ethiopian history and society. Strong reservations were made about the adequacy of the models that perceive Christian Abyssinia or Ethiopian Christianity as the only paradigm of Ethiopian identity and the touchstone for the interpretation of the histories of all communities living within the present-day Ethiopian territory. This necessitates a criticism of the existing historiography for its inherent bias against Ethiopian Islam which only partially stemmed

¹ The issue of the percentage of the Ethiopian Muslim population has remained unresolved, and will perhaps remain an enigma until a proper, reliable and verifiable census is undertaken. Estimates have varied in the sources. The earliest documentary evidence is Almeida in the 17th century who wrote that the Muslim population constituted a third of the country's total: in Beckingham and Huntingford (trans./ed.), *Some Records of Ethiopia*, p. 55. Some Muslim sources indicate higher, and clearly exaggerated, figures: 65% in *al-'Ilm*, 3 (1983), p. 117; 65-70% in Muhammad Samullah, "Forsaken Muslims of Ethiopia," *The Muslim World League Journal*, 10, 7 (1983), p. 41; 75%: Abu Ahmad, *al-Islam al-Jarib*, pp. 132-33. Recent international estimates vary from 35%: *Africa South of the Sahara 1971* (London, 1971), p. 314, to 45%: op. cit., p. 361, for the year 1983-84. *The Europa Year Book 1984* (London, 1984), p. 1559, the *Statesman's Year Book 1984-85* (London, 1984), p. 448. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Office of Population and Housing Census Commission, Central Statistical Authority, *The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia, Summary Report at Country and Regional Levels* (Addis Ababa, June 1998), p. 3: Ethiopian Muslims represent 32.8% of the total population.

from the nature of the more readily available sources. As already noted, that bias has manifested itself in both the neglect and *a priori* distortion of Islam and in certain prejudices which have formed an integral part of the ideological panoply of Christian dynasts.

The focus of the study then shifted from a general and introductory discussion of Ethiopian Islam to a specific geographical region, Wallo, which may be considered as the Ethiopian heartland of predominantly Muslim communities. The justification for the shift was the need for highlighting the importance of regional studies and other broad themes introduced earlier, such as the existence of untapped evidence and the dynamism of Islam at the local level.

As a background to the discussion of the history of Islam in Wallo, a brief demographical and historical account of settlement patterns and of other aspects of the political and cultural geography of the region from the early mediaeval period up to the end of the fifteenth century was included.

The impact of two significant sixteenth-century events, namely, the military conquests led by Grāñ and the settlement of the Oromo, on local history and ethnic and cultural configuration was also analyzed. While the Grāñ episode gave a temporary impetus to pre-existing Islam, and left behind enclaves of Muslim converts which later became the vehicle for further Islamic diffusion, it was in fact the Oromo settlement pattern that mostly shaped the demography and political history, and to a considerable extent, the culture of the local communities. At a later stage, such a pattern played an important role in the consolidation of Islam. Of the several cultural currents which influenced the historical development of Wallo, the establishment and consolidation of Islam, and the settlement of the Oromo, were the most pervasive and of far-reaching consequences. Grāñ's efforts at religious unification failed, as did the attempt made by Christian rulers in collaboration with the church. This double failure should probably be seen as a central and telling feature of Ethiopian history.

The section on the Oromo settlements drew attention to the need for a fresh examination of the role of the Oromo people in the development of historical and present-day Wallo, not only in bringing about ethnic diversity, but also in influencing the emergence of local political institutions, and from the eighteenth century onwards, in the further strengthening of Islam. In this respect we criticized some notions portraying the Oromo clans as hordes sweeping across

central and northern Ethiopia, destroying everything before them, and their movements as nothing more than another negative factor which undermined the political stability of the late mediaeval Christian kingdom and brought highland trade to a standstill, especially in Wallo. The role of the Oromo has been, as much as that of Islam, both neglected and distorted by received wisdom. In order to have a better understanding of the development of Wallo as an inherently heterogeneous regional entity, and of its social and religious institutions, such aspects as the Oromo settlement pattern and the process of mutually advantageous and positive interaction between them and the pre-existing indigenous peoples, were briefly discussed. Several stages in the unfolding of this process, which culminated in the beginning of the decline of Wallo as a dynastic centre, were proposed, so as to enable us to review the Oromo impact on Wallo over a long chronological span.

In the second chapter the focus was on a more detailed treatment of two such themes, namely, the need for a study of the internal development of regional Islam and for the examination of local traditions of Islamization. The discussion started with a critical review of some general assumptions made by several writers about Islamization in Ethiopia, and of the excessive emphasis placed by them on the strictly political aspects of the expansion of Islam by neglecting broader and more enduring cultural aspects.

Dombrowski's treatment of the earliest period of Islamic expansion in Ethiopia was scrutinized in some detail, and the validity of his interpretation questioned, on theoretical, chronological and historical grounds. His (and Trimingham's) suggestion that the tenth and eleventh centuries were the earliest possible period for the beginning of the systematic diffusion of Islam in Ethiopia seems to have been derived from the general premise that the introduction of Islam followed the establishment of a Muslim state. However, there are epigraphic sources and oral traditions about the genesis of Muslim communities which point to earlier times.

The hypothetical stages of Islamization proposed by Cerulli, especially his reluctance to conceive developments in north/central Ethiopia similar to those which took place in the southern regions were critically examined. Also in the same chapter, the process of Islamization was treated from the perspective of recent theoretical discussions about conversion to Christianity and Islam in Africa, and from the point of view of indigenous traditions of Islamization. While acknowledging

the valuable contributions made by the international community of scholars engaged in such discussions, and their role in widening the analytical scope and raising crucial issues about the process of religious change in ways not addressed by the available traditions, we also pointed out the limitations of the models suggested, and raised the question of their applicability to the Ethiopian context.

In particular Trimingham's model of three stages of Islamization, and of the assimilation of paganism by Islam, was shown to be inadequate for the following reasons: firstly, it does not take sufficiently into consideration historical circumstances such as the conditions of the earliest penetration of Islam; secondly, it does not fully analyze the various local examples and traditions which he himself frequently cited; and thirdly, it is excessively vague from the chronological point of view. Perhaps more importantly, it does not even raise, let alone tackle, the problem of what categories of people—traders, clerics or immigrant families—were mainly responsible for the propagation and consolidation of Islam. The features which he ascribed to each of the three stages are historically unsubstantiated. This is not to imply that Islam in Ethiopia has always existed in a pure and orthodox form. The influence of pre-Islamic belief system has indeed been strong; however, this has been not so much because of the nature of Islam that was introduced and taught in Ethiopia as because of the vitality and resistance of traditional forms of worship—a factor that deserves to be recognized. Broadly speaking, what this chapter attempted to do was to develop, on the basis of the limited evidence available, a theoretical scheme in which the main emphasis was on the role of both indigenous and foreign scholars in the introduction and expansion of Islam, and on the contributions made at other levels by traders and peasants towards its consolidation.

The chapter also dealt with the Wallo traditions of Islamization, as those of other Muslim communities elsewhere in the country, in order to strengthen the argument that indigenous clerics played a decisive role in the dissemination of Islam, which was not achieved solely through conquest or as a spontaneous and inevitable consequence of commerce. One of these traditions was that of the Jabarti in which prominence was given to the migration of Arab families (consisting of clerics and traders), which is said to have taken place over a long span of time: from the late seventh to the sixteenth century, and to the founding of Muslim communities and local dynas-

ties in Ethiopia, both in the north, on the Dahlak islands, and in the south, in the Awāsh basin.

The significance of the Asqāri and Ad Kabirē traditions lies in the fact that not only do they tally well with the epigraphic evidence from Tegrāy, which suggests the existence of ancient Muslim communities in the north, but they also reinforce the argument for a northern route of Islamic expansion from the Dahlak islands through Tāmbarīn and Endartā to western and central Wallo—a route which complemented that which ran from Zeila through Ifāt to southeastern and eastern Wallo. Hence the Wallo region south of the Bashlo River was influenced by two currents of Islamic cultural influence, and it owed much of its later prominence as a Muslim heartland to this circumstance. This is best illustrated by the presence of two dominant schools of Islamic law: the Shāfi'i and the Ḥanaffī, both of which are well-represented in Wallo as well as in Tegrāy.

The section on the distribution of Sunni Islam and the religious brotherhoods in Ethiopia and in Wallo demonstrated that the coexistence of diverse Islamic legal and mystical traditions was a consequence of their peaceful penetration. Indigenous scholars were in the forefront of the introduction and cultivation of these traditions amongst the local populations. It is hoped that the discussion sheds light on another crucial theme to which frequent reference has been made in the present study: that the various Muslim communities in Ethiopia cannot be considered as isolated social or cultural entities with no contact or interaction among themselves, and that new currents of ideas used to flow from Harar to Wallo, Tegrāy and Gondar, and vice-versa. The introduction of the Qādiriyah order from Harar to Wallo in the late eighteenth century, and the strong influence of the centres of Islamic teaching and Sufism in Yajju and Qāllū upon Harar and southern and southwestern Ethiopia, bear witness to the vitality and vigour of indigenous Islam in many places. Such dynamic inter-regional cultural linkages and scholarly (and commercial) networks have transcended ethnic and political allegiances.

The third chapter took up the process of Islamization in Ethiopia in more detail. It focussed on Wallo during the first half of the nineteenth century, with particular reference to the origins, expansion and importance of the Sūfī traditions and other manifestations of Islamic revival. It was argued that there is a correlation between these developments and the intellectual currents of reform and renewal

in the wider Islamic world. While the impetus to the revival of Islam came from outside, the form the local response took was typically Ethiopian. In the Islamic heartlands outside Ethiopia, the emphasis was on fundamentalism² and puritanism; in Ethiopia, especially in Wallo, the accent was on revivalism as expressed and articulated vigorously through the expansion of the influence of the *tariqa* as a typical Islamic institution, the further dissemination of Islam, and the emergence of new centres of teaching and local pilgrimage, as well as through various other means of renewal and reform. There were also internal factors which stimulated this spirit of resurgence: the expansion of trade and the rise of provincial dynasties in Wallo whose rulers became active patrons of Islam. Indigenous Islam thus gained new ground by securing their official protection.

The period between 1800 and 1850 marked a new phase in the expansion of Islam which was facilitated, as noted earlier, by the further expansion of the mystical orders. The chapter therefore discussed the crucial question of their role in that respect. The mystical orders gave a fresh impetus to the development of scholarship and opened up a new dimension to individual and collective worship by introducing new elements such as organized sessions of *dikr* recitation and saint veneration. The rise of a number of Sufi centres of education and pilgrimage in Wallo, like those at Jamā Negus and Gata, reflected the pervasive influence of the orders upon the lives of ordinary Muslims, while the popular manifestation of Sufism at the festivals illustrates the survival of non-Islamic elements of belief and practice.

The tradition of revival and renewal was best embodied in the careers of three Wallo Muslim scholar-saints and reformers: *Shaykh* Muhammad Shāfi of Albukko, *Shaykh* Ja'far Bukko of Laga Gorā and *al-Hājj* Bushrā of Qāllu. The account of their lives and activities is revealing from the point of view of the influence of external Islamic thoughts and the vitality of local response.

While *Shaykh* Muhammad Shāfi and *al-Hājj* Bushrā had direct personal experiences of training in the mystical way and intellectual exposure to new ideas emanating from outside their own communities, and possessed a higher level of intellectual sophistication and

scholarly accomplishment, *Shaykh* Ja'far's aspirations and activities were circumscribed within the framework of his immediate social and cultural environment. Therefore, *Shaykh* Muhammad Shāfi can be said to have represented most dramatically the more militant dimension of Islamic revival in Wallo.

Shaykh Muhammad Shāfi perceived the *jihād* (in the sense of the Holy War) as a means of bringing about the renewal and triumph of Islam. Despite the esoteric as well as overt instructions that he had received from the spiritual heads of the mystical orders in the Hijāz, he proceeded to wage the *jihād* of the sword because of his strong conviction that it was timely and practically feasible. His militancy had three objectives: to push the frontier of Islam forward through the conversion of the neighbouring Christian communities, to defend his own community against attacks by the surrounding Christian chiefs, especially those of Antokivā, and to provide assistance to local Muslim potentates whose political position was under external threat and whose allegiance to Islam was therefore in danger. But in the oral and written sources used in the present study, there was no indication that *Shaykh* Muhammad Shāfi ever entertained any political aspiration, i.e., to establish a theocratic state, like the later jihadists of West Africa and the Sudan.

As well as being an avowed Holy War militant, *Shaykh* Muhammad Shāfi was also committed to broadening and preserving the scholarly and mystical aspects of Islam, as is evident from his reputation as a teacher and prolific writer of a number of treatises, and from his position in the Wallo Qādīnī *silsila*. In fact the local traditions emphasize the saintly aspect of his life and glorify his power of working miracles. His contribution to the resurgence of Islam was therefore considerable while his militancy was a source of inspiration for the Wallo Muslim dissidents of the 1880s. His shrine at Jamā Negus is a living example of his spiritual legacy and a testimony to his reputation as a resourceful and charismatic Muslim scholar, saint and militant leader.

Shaykh Ja'far embodied another and more typical aspect of the local vitality of Islam in the region. The dominant feature of his career was his attempt to introduce a fundamental reform of the prevailing religious and social practices. He waged his struggle on several fronts: against the representatives of traditional belief as well against specific Muslim practices which he perceived to be contrary to the Sharī'a; against Muslim religious officials whom he accused

² On the issue of fundamentalism in relation to contemporary Ethiopia, see my "Islamic Literature and Religious Revival in Ethiopia (1991–1994)," *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara*, 12 (1998), pp. 105–108.

of misappropriating pious funds and of enforcing uncanonical rules of succession to the office of the *qādī*, and against the secular chiefs because of their violation of the sacred law and ostentatious life style. Hence the antagonism between *Shaykh* Ja'far, on the one hand, and the members of the local religious and political establishment, on the other, reflected the struggle between an active Muslim reformer and those who were determined to safeguard their vested interests in the *status quo*.

The third mystic and scholar who represented the indigenous tradition of reform, *al-Hājj* Bushrā, led a life dominated by a perpetual struggle against "reprehensible innovations" embedded in the existing religious practices. Having received his early training in the classical Islamic disciplines, and imbued with a mystical inclination which he further developed and refined during his scholarly sojourn in the Sudan, he was well-placed to look upon the local modes of religious practice and morality with a sense of intellectual detachment, and to judge whether or not they conformed to Islamic orthodoxy as he perceived it. As well as condemning such un-Islamic rituals as the *zār*-possession cult and worshipping under trees, he is also credited with taking an uncompromising stance against those Muslims who were lax in their observance of the legally-prescribed rites. Although there are traditions which emphasize that he was prepared to defend orthodoxy by coercive measures, he seems to have put less emphasis on the holy-war *jihād* than his predecessor, *Shaykh* Muhammad Shāfi'. *Al-Hājj* Bushrā was also a widely-recognized teacher and author of a number of works, as well as a saint of widespread reputation. Like *Shaykh* Muhammad Shāfi', he integrated the mystical and scholarly aspects of Islam into a harmonious combination. While his initiation into the Sammānī and Khatmī orders further developed his mystical and reflective inclinations, his scholarly training reinforced his efforts to defend and disseminate the principles of Islamic orthodoxy.

What were the major features which these early Islamic reformers had in common? In what ways did they differ from each other? Firstly, they all had a deep awareness of the need for reform and a commitment to stamp out the vestiges of traditional belief. Secondly, they possessed an exceptional quality of charismatic leadership, intellectual vigour, prolific scholarship and a critical attitude towards established authority, whether secular or religious. Thirdly, their vision of reform was confined to changing the prevailing religious and

customary practices, and did not encompass and envisage the formation of an Islamic form of government. Fourthly, they lacked a sufficiently viable base of material and human resources which could have facilitated the rapid spread of their messages and influence beyond their immediate localities, and therefore their movements of reform and renewal did not persist into the time of their successors. On the other hand, they differed from each other only in the degree of emphasis they placed on the specific means which they employed to carry out their missions. While *Shaykh* Muhammad Shāfi' stressed the holy-war *jihād*, he did not disregard the intellectual and mystical aspects of reform. As for *Shaykh* Ja'far, there is no indication in the traditions about him that he ever undertook, or contemplated undertaking, a holy war to realize his objectives, though he did raise the subject with his contemporaries. *Al-Hājj* Bushrā was not committed to the *jihād* of the sword but was equally vigorous in attacking those who violated the principles of Sunnī Islam.

In their relationship with secular leaders, the three figures showed a more obvious difference, though not a fundamental divergence. In the early part of his career, *Shaykh* Muhammad Shāfi' sought and obtained the support of the contemporary hereditary ruler of Garfā, and later provided assistance to the prince of Warra Hinano. However, he was not involved in any other direct relationship with secular authorities. The main reason for this might have been the fact that his area of activities was located outside the principal administrative centres of Wallo and along the frontier with Shawā.

Shaykh Ja'far not only maintained an attitude of open hostility towards Adara Billē, the chief of Laga Gorā, but also took over what apparently had been the prerogative of the local rulers to confirm the appointment of the *qādī*. He remained adamant in his refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the rulers as long as they appeared to be morally corrupt and only nominally Muslim. That is why he condemned the complacency and subservience of the 'ulamā' attached to the chiefly courts.

By contrast, *al-Hājj* Bushrā was on friendly terms with Berru Lubo. This may strike us as unusual in view of the cleric's reputation as a strict Muslim. However, we need to bear three points in mind to clarify the nature of the relationship between them. Firstly, unlike the traditional 'ulamā' who were closely attached to the courts of Muslim rulers, *al-Hājj* Bushrā was not too intimately associated with Berru and too dependent on his generosity to compromise his

principles. Secondly, his intimacy must be seen in the light of the motive behind the relationship, which was to secure *waqf*-land for members of the Muslim scholarly community. As the traditions emphasize, he developed his relationship with Berru from a position of strength rather than weakness. Thirdly, as we saw earlier, he was more of a pacifistic than a militant *jihadist*.

The relationship between Islam and regional and local power, which was the main theme of the third chapter, developed out of circumstances discussed earlier. On the basis of the available oral material, we suggested that the cleric-chief relationship was too subtle to be reduced to a simple opposition between friendly or hostile clerics, on the one hand, and committed or indifferent chiefs, on the other. Three categories of clerics can be identified in terms of their relationships with chiefs: those who were strongly opposed; those friendly towards, but not too closely associated with, the local authorities; and those clerics who had no dealings with the chiefs at all. As for the chiefs, some were generous and sympathetic towards the local *'ulamā'* for both altruistic and political reasons; others were more active supporters of the clerics and their causes; and still others were either openly hostile or indifferent.

Whatever the nature of the relationship between Muslim scholars and chiefs, Islam constituted an important factor for the founding of local dynasties in central and southeastern Wallo. It also provided legitimacy for the rulers of Warra Himano and served as an ideology for strengthening internal cultural integration, resisting external encroachment, and launching campaigns of territorial expansion. The history of the principality of Warra Himano gives insight into this aspect of local Islam. Founded, according to tradition, by a Muslim cleric, the dynasty owed its further expansion, and the consolidation of its power over a large part of southern Wallo, to a vigorous policy of firm commitment to Islam pursued by its rulers. The career of Muhammad 'Ali illustrates the way in which a hereditary ruler was able to reinforce his power through a policy of active support for the local *'ulamā'*. His son, Amadé (Ahmad), was even more aware of the advantages of a pro-Muslim commitment: it was he who declared himself *imām*. Liban, his successor, pursued the policy of his predecessors with equal fervour. In short, the most prominent feature of the reigns of the Warra Himano princes, from the time of Muhammad 'Ali in the 1770s and 1780s to that of Amadé Liban (d. 1838), was their religious conviction and commitment.

The role of Islam as a basis for political integration at the regional

level began to decline from the 1840s, as the old petty chiefdoms of Wallo south of the Bashlo and Mille Rivers were unable to reassert their former power. A period of intense but inconclusive rivalry for supremacy ensued. However, Islam continued to serve as a basis of cultural identity, and the degree of the rulers' commitment to it did not diminish.

The discussion on trade and society in chapter five integrated a number of closely-related themes which figured in the other sections of the present study: geography, commerce, internal migration of groups of the Muslim trading diaspora, and the relations between Islam and political power. The main reason for focussing on southeastern Wallo is not only the weight of the available oral and written data from that area, but also the fact that it provides an insight into the question of how the growth of internal trade is linked to external developments, and into how this can lead to the emergence of prosperous trading communities and to inter-dependence between merchants, chiefs and clerics.

The development of long-distance trade in Dawway dates from the late eighteenth century. The major factors were the area's strategic position in relation to the coast and to central and western Wallo, the rise of the port of Täjura as an outlet for domestic trade, the opening of a new route via Awsā, and the emergence of Shawā and Qāllu. Groups of Muslim traders settled in the area in the 1830s and 1840s, and established themselves as a commercial aristocracy. The contemporary Qāllu rulers and their vassals in Reqqé encouraged and actively supported the new immigrants. An informal alliance between chiefs and trading families was thus established.

In order to safeguard its economic interests and maintain its internal identity, the new commercial community developed a social and economic structure based on endogamous marriage and residential segregation of craftsmen, and on the monopoly of trade. The wealthy merchants actively supported the local clerical class and this gave an impetus to the development of Islamic scholarship. Finally, the factors which contributed to the decline of the commercial importance of Dawway and of the fortunes of the prosperous trading communities were examined.

The sixth chapter discussed the position of Islam in Wallo in the second half of the nineteenth century, especially its relationship with the reconstituted Christian kingdom under Tewodros II and Yohannes IV. The period marked a watershed in the history of the region and of Islam because of the new pressures to which Muslims living there

were subjected: the attempts of the Christian monarchs to secure the submission of the Wallo hereditary rulers and to contain Islam.

We first reviewed the policy of Tēwodros towards Wallo and Islam on the basis of contemporary accounts and in the light of the various interpretations advanced by modern scholars. Tēwodros's aim of subduing the Wallo dynasts, while being understandable in view of his declared, though hardly fulfilled, national objective, was also motivated by a specific desire to undermine Islam. As Marcus put it: "To demonstrate the value of national unity, Tēwodros had hoped to thwart and turn back Islam . . . He regarded the record of Islam as one of mayhem and subversion . . ."³ The three principal features of Tēwodros's policy towards Wallo were: firstly, the apparent contradiction between, on the one hand, his ideal of building a politically-reunified Ethiopia, which has rightly been considered by many writers as the most noble aspect of his reign and probably his most enduring legacy, and, on the other, his determination to destroy the very elements that were an integral part of Ethiopia. His vision of a united Ethiopia seems not to have been sufficiently broad to accommodate the Muslim communities of Wallo. The second aspect was the increasing repression and terror that led to further rebellion and violent resistance; and the third feature was the apparent intensity of his own personal commitment to deal severely with the Wallo "problem".

The resistance of the Wallo hereditary chiefs was at times divided, but was nevertheless formidable. Contemporary accounts generally emphasized the role of Islam in the resistance but the degree to which it served as a rallying point for the rebels remains to be examined in detail.

During the first decade following the death of Tēwodros in 1868, Wallo was engulfed in an internecine struggle for power among the rival factions of the Warra Himano dynasty; it also gradually fell within the sphere of influence of Shawā under Menilek.

When Yohannes came to power, he was confronted with the old problem of how to integrate Wallo into his empire. While being more prepared to accommodate the local rulers of Wallo and other provinces than Tēwodros was⁴ (hence there were no open revolts against him in the former region), he openly adopted a new policy which was apparently far more extreme than Tēwodros's: the overt

imposition of a single religion as the basis of political unification. Motivated by the mediaeval ideal of a Christian Ethiopia, and the alleged danger which the presence of Islam posed to the fulfilment of that ideal, he attempted to bring about the conversion of the Wallo Muslims by forceful means. His 1878 edict also threatened to deprive the Muslims of their status as Ethiopian citizens if they did not conform to the edict's conditions. New social and economic burdens were imposed on those who resisted conversion.

Current scholarship and local traditions, as well as Yohannes himself in his official correspondence, have put forward differing and contradictory views as to what factors motivated the emperor to adopt such a policy. Some writers explained it in terms of his fear of a link-up between external threat and indigenous Islam; however, that threat had been eliminated by 1878. Others attempted to justify the policy and the way it was implemented in terms of its objective, "national unity" which was seen as a positive ideal. Whatever the motives which influenced the formulation of the policy and the objective envisaged, the fact remains that the Wallo Muslim communities were the ultimate victims of the repressive measures taken to enforce the decree.

The resistance to the new policy was pre-eminently led by militant clerics because of—and despite—the conversion to Christianity of the region's two powerful political rivals: Muhammad 'Ali and *Abba Wālāw*. That Islam was a unifying factor in the resistance is evident from, firstly, the fact that it was led by Muslim clerics, and secondly, from the fact that in the mid-1880s the Wallo political dissidents, though recent converts to Christianity, joined forces with the Muslim religious opposition. Underlying the political revolts and clerical dissidence was a general disaffection on a very broad basis: a reaction to nearly three decades of continuous devastation and punitive expeditions, and to a policy which was inimical to the Muslim culture of the indigenous people.

In discussing the local response to religious coercion, we have identified three types of reaction: nominal conversion to Christianity or dissimulation (*tagīya*), which applied to some of the members of the Muslim elite and the ordinary people (which is attested in the local oral traditions), open resistance by militant clerics, and migration leading to the breakdown of social life.⁵

³ Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, p. 69.

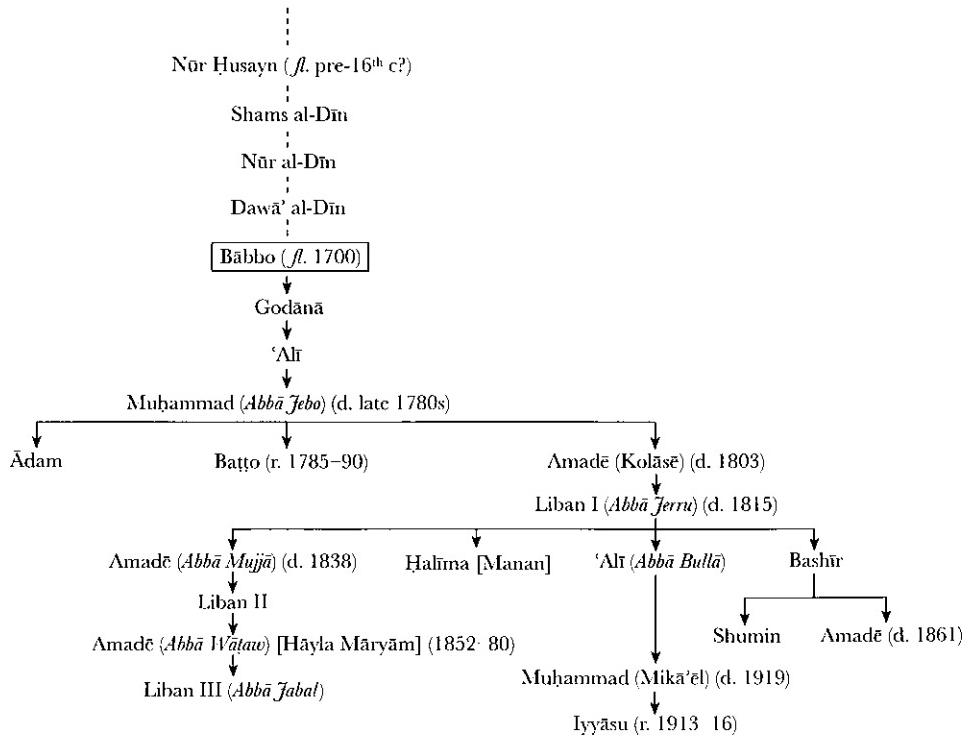
⁴ Bahru, *A Modern History of Ethiopia*, p. 48.

⁵ For a similar response of Nigerian Muslims, see Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa*, pp. 269–71.

Finally, the account of the resistance led by the Muslim clerics and chiefs of the 1880s illustrates a number of broad themes that pervaded the final chapter of the present study. Firstly, it shows that Islam was a crucial factor that unified the various rebellions, as well as being an essential part of the indigenous culture. Secondly, the resistance was not inspired and sustained by foreign Muslim powers but was only a local reaction to an Ethiopian internal problem. The alleged conspiratorial link between Islam within and outside of Wallo is hardly substantiable. Thirdly, Yohannes's policy of religious "unification" was essentially negative since it deprived the indigenous Muslims of the freedom of worship and right of citizenship; divisive because it led to the alienation of a significant section of the Ethiopian population; and destructive since it caused the Muslims of eastern Wallo much loss of lives and cultural heritage.

APPENDIX

GENEALOGY OF THE MĀMMADOCH DYNASTY OF WARRA HIMANO (1700–1916)



GLOSSARY

The meanings of terms given below are those which obtain in the historical context examined in the present study.

A. Arabic

<i>hajj</i>	the holy pilgrimage to Mecca
<i>harīm</i>	harem, female members of a family
<i>hātif</i>	invisible caller, inspirer
<i>hijra</i>	a) the emigration of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 A.D. b) the emigration of the Prophet's first followers from Mecca to Aksum in 615 A.D.
<i>yāza</i>	licence or certificate for teaching
<i>ikhlās</i>	sincere affection
<i>iḥn</i>	knowledge, learning
<i>imām</i>	leader of the obligatory Islamic prayers; title of the Muslim rulers of Warra Himano in Wallo and those of Harar
<i>imāmate</i>	the office of the <i>imām</i> or the principality under his rule
<i>jabarti</i>	from <i>jabart</i> or <i>jabra</i> , the name given to a settlement near Zeila where the early Muslim emigrants established a community; later came to apply to highland Ethiopian Muslims
<i>jihād</i>	efforts made "in the way of Allāh", which may or may not include Holy War
<i>jinn</i>	spirits, demons
<i>karāma</i>	power of a <i>walī</i> to work miracles
<i>kashf</i>	power to see and interpret remote happenings
<i>khādim</i>	one who offers daily services to his <i>shaykh</i>
<i>khalīfa</i>	successor to a Muslim political office or to a founder of a Sufi centre
<i>khateea</i>	a Sufi retreat
<i>madh</i>	eulogy in honour of the Prophet or a local saint
<i>madhab</i>	school of Islamic jurisprudence
<i>madhhab</i>	the rightly-guided one
<i>mādih</i>	virtues, feats; a literary genre extolling the deeds of a saint
<i>manāqib</i>	a didactic poem recited at religious festivals
<i>manzūma</i>	Mecca
<i>fātim</i>	Muslim savant, scholar
<i>amīr</i>	commander, prince; honorific title of a member of a ruling house
<i>asqān</i>	title of descendants of a holy family
<i>asrār</i> (sing. <i>sirr</i>)	inner secret of mystical thought
<i>awījā'</i> (see <i>walī</i>)	
<i>awāḍ</i> (see <i>urwā</i>)	
<i>baldā'</i>	soucage, tribulation
<i>baraka</i>	divine favour, a chief characteristic of a <i>walī</i>
<i>biḍ'a</i>	reprehensible innovation
<i>bashā'</i>	(= Pasha), a military title equivalent to <i>amīr</i> , Turkish in origin
<i>dārīk</i>	tomb, especially of a saint
<i>darasa</i>	(from <i>darasa</i> : to study); a young student or follower of a <i>shaykh</i>
<i>dhākir</i>	one who is engaged in a <i>dhikr</i>
<i>dhikr</i>	lit.: recollection; in Sufism, regular repetition of words or formulas in praise of God
<i>fann</i>	academic discipline
<i>faqīh</i> (pl. <i>faqīha</i>)	jurist and theologian
<i>fath</i>	victory, conquest; also a spiritual mission
<i>fugāṭā'</i> (see <i>fāṭīḥ</i>)	succour; chief of the <i>awījā'</i>
<i>ghauṭh</i>	offering made to a <i>shaykh</i> or at a shrine
<i>hadīya</i>	Sufi gathering for collective worship
<i>hadrā</i>	title given to one who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca

<i>māshī</i>	an itinerant student
<i>mawlid</i>	the Prophet's birthday anniversary festival
<i>mujāhid</i>	one who is engaged in a <i>jihād</i>
<i>marīd</i>	a Ṣūfī aspirant or initiate
<i>nisba</i>	scription, kinship
<i>qāḍī</i>	judge
<i>qari'a</i> (<i>qari'a</i>)	lit.: misfortune; begging for food by students in the rural areas and towns
<i>qāt</i>	<i>Cathaa edulis</i> ; a shrub whose tender leaves are chewed and the juice has a stimulating effect; consumed at religious gatherings and on special social occasions; <i>čāt</i> in the northern and central highlands of Ethiopia
<i>rāhma</i>	compassion
<i>ribāt</i>	a Ṣūfī frontier retreat
<i>sayyāḥ</i>	a missionary or a traveller
<i>sayyid</i>	an honorific title given to a recognized scholar or saint
<i>sharī'a</i>	the divine or revealed law
<i>shaykh</i>	scholar, cleric
<i>shaykh al-tarīqa</i>	one who has completed training as a Ṣūfī mystic
<i>sikīla</i>	chain of mystical genealogy
<i>ṣūfi</i>	mystic
<i>tadrīs</i>	teaching
<i>taqīya</i>	dissimulation of one's belief under unfavourable conditions
<i>tarīqa</i>	the Ṣūfī way; a mystical order
<i>taṣawwuf</i>	Islamic mysticism
<i>‘ulamā’</i> (see ‘ālim)	God's protégé; saint
<i>waqf</i>	charitable property (in Wallo, usually land)
<i>wird</i> (pl. <i>aurād</i>)	litany recited by a Ṣūfī
<i>zakāt</i>	alms tax
<i>zāwiyya</i>	hospice, a multi-purpose Ṣūfī centre of teaching, a rural mosque
<i>zijāra</i>	visitation made to a Ṣūfī shrine

B. Non-Arabic: Amharic, Ethiopic and Kushitic

<i>abbā</i>	lit.: father; as a title, it is used for an elderly man or priest; part of a traditional "horse-name"; in local Islam it is used as an agnomen
<i>abbā gār</i>	a traditional leader of a ritual ceremony; assimilated into popular Islam to mean a leader of a religious gathering
<i>alayā</i>	title of a chief priest
<i>amolē</i>	salt bar once used as a medium of exchange in local markets
<i>asē</i>	title: emperor
<i>atāri</i>	lit.: "One who builds a fence"; trader
<i>ato</i>	a common title of respect used with a man's given name
<i>aurājā</i>	an administrative unit within a province
<i>bajrawand</i>	title: treasurer
<i>chāt</i> (see <i>qāt</i> in section A)	military and civil title: general or governor
<i>dajāch</i> or <i>dajāzmāch</i>	a fraction of <i>amolē</i>
<i>eyalē</i>	exorcist (a corruption of the Arabic <i>fajrā</i>) (pl. of <i>fajr</i> : a Ṣūfī mendicant)
<i>fujrā</i>	a tribute-paying subject; tenant
<i>gabbar</i>	system of traditional social and political organization of the Oromo based on generation-grading
<i>gadā</i>	pasture land; site of a ritual, usually under a tree
<i>gobadan</i>	lit.: child; honorific title of members of the high nobility
<i>lēj</i>	nobleman, prince; also used as a title: governor
<i>masfen</i> (pl. <i>masāfen</i>)	trader
<i>naggādē</i>	a customs official; chief of long-distance merchants
<i>naggādās</i>	title: king

- qallabi* provider, patron of Muslim clerics and their students
qālilechā ritual leader; Muslim cleric
rānāā a collection of pious songs recited at the beginning of a religious gathering or festival
rās title: duke or governor

- wadājā* collective worship, supplication

- wag shum* title of the hereditary rulers of Wāg in northwest Wallo

- wājirāt* inter-communal feuds; a variant of *wayyānē*

- wayyānē* periodic feuds amongst individuals or groups; raids; ritual fighting

- Zamana Macāfent* The Age of the Princes; the period in the history of north/central Ethiopia when imperial authority almost ceased to exist, and military and political power was exercised by the provincial lords from ca. 1750 to 1850

- zār* cult of spirit-possession

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- Name of Informant*
1. 'Abd al-Salām Muhammad Surūr, *Shaykh*. (aged 52; a descendant of *al-Hājj* Bushrā; then resided in Shawā Robit, where he was the *mām* of the local mosque)
2. Ahmad al-Tayyib, *Shaykh*. (businessman)
3. Ahmad Yūsuf, *Amīr*. (aged 70; a descendant of the hereditary rulers of Ifat; no occupation)
4. 'Alī Yūsuf, *Shaykh*. (aged 65; formerly a *qādī* in Addis Ababa; now deceased)
5. Hāyélē Fāris, *Abu*. (formerly a long-distance trader)
6. Husayn Sayyid, *Shaykh*. (aged 58; a cleric with modest Islamic education)
7. Kabbo Yūsuf, *Abu*. (knowledgeable about the local history of Dawaway; now deceased)
8. Muhammād Jāmmā, *Shaykh*. (at the time, *mām* one of the principal mosques in Dessie)
9. Muhammād Nūr 'Umar, *al-Hājj*. (a local scholar)
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10. Muhammad Siraj, *Shaykh*.
 (also a local scholar)
11. Muhammad Tāj al-Dīn Ahmad,
Shaykh al-Hāfi.
 (aged 67; principal informant; the most renowned of the contemporary Wallo Muslim scholars; well-versed in the classical Islamic sciences and noted for his versatility, charisma and erudition; author of a comprehensive biography of Ethiopian Muslim scholars and saints)
12. Muhammad al-Tayyib, *al-Hāfi*.
 (well-versed in the history of Islam in Ethiopia)
13. Muhammad Thāni Ḥabbū, *Shaykh al-Hāfi*.
 (a distinguished scholar; the most prominent figure in the Ethiopian Muslim community; for many years *mām* of the central mosque in the capital; died in 1989)
14. Muhammnad Wale Abnnaid, *Shaykh al-Hāfi*.
 (well-read; a resourceful and impressive scholar; author of a hagiographical work; formerly *mām* of one of the big mosques in Addis Ababa)
15. Muhammnad Zaki Ilyās, *al-Hāfi*.
 (aged 48; trained in Islamic law at the University of al-Azhar, Cairo; teacher)
16. Muzaaffar Babru, *Shaykh*.
 (aged 45; gifted oral historian; teacher)
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